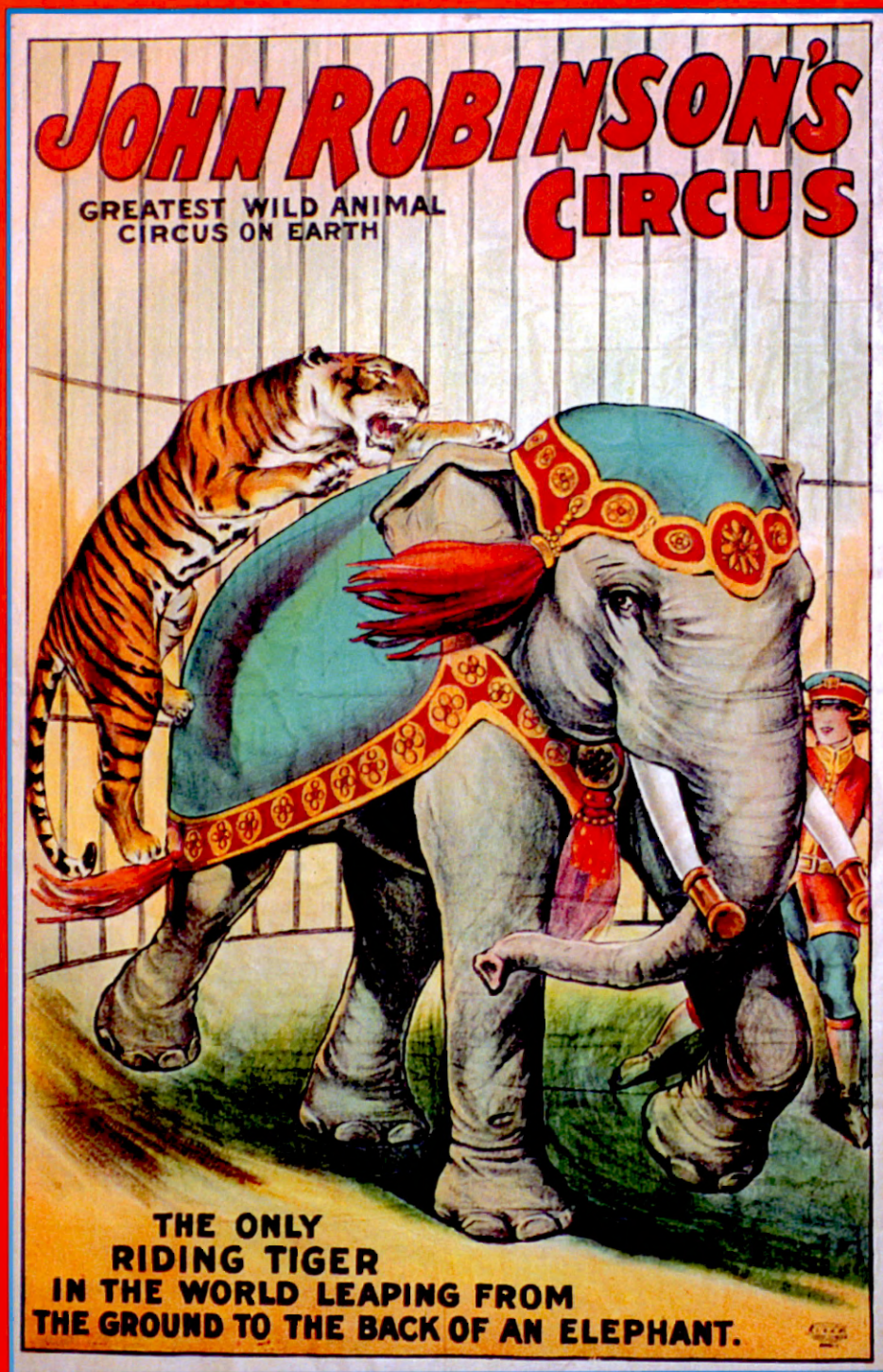


# **BANDWAGON**

**THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.**

**NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2001**





# BANDWAGON

## THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

Vol. 45, No. 6

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2001

**FRED D. PFENING, JR. EDITOR AND PUBLISHER**

Joseph T. Bradbury, Associate Editor Emeritus

Bandwagon, The Journal of the Circus Historical Society, Inc. (USPS 406-390) (ISSN 0005-4968), is published bi-monthly by the Circus Historical Society, Inc., 1075 West Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212-2691. Periodicals Postage Paid at Columbus, OH. Postmaster: Send address changes to Bandwagon, 1075 West Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212-2691.

Editorial, advertising and circulation office is located at 2515 Dorset Rd., Columbus, OH 43221. Phone (614) 294-5361. Advertising rates are: Full page \$100, half page \$60, quarter page \$35. Minimum ad \$25.

Bandwagon, new membership and subscription rate: \$34.00 per year in the United States; \$39.00 per year outside United States. Single copies \$5.00 plus \$2 postage. Please direct all concerns regarding address changes and lack of delivery to the editor. Offices of the Circus Historical Society, Inc. are located at 1075 West Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212.

CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. Richard J. Reynolds III, President, 1186 Warrenhall La. N.E., Atlanta, GA 30319. Al Stencell, Vice President, 15 Lark St., Toronto, Ont., Can, M4L-3M5; Dave Price, Secretary-Treasurer, 1954 Old Hickory Blvd., Brentwood, TN 37027-4014.

Trustees: Fred Dahlinger, Jr., 45 Roblee Rd., Baraboo, WI 53913; John McConnell, 1 Skyline Dr., Morristown, NJ 07960; Fred D. Pfening, Jr., 2515 Dorset Rd., Columbus, OH 43221; Fred D. Pfening III, 1075 W. Fifth Ave., Columbus, OH 43212; Dave Price, 1954 Old Hickory Blvd., Brentwood, TN 37027; John F. Polacsek, 5980 Lannoo, Detroit, MI 48236; Richard J. Reynolds III, 1186 Warrenhall Lane N.E., Atlanta, GA 30319; Robert F. Sabia, 3100 Parkside La., Williamsburg, VA 23185; Al Stencell, 15 Lark St., Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M4L-3M5. Trustees Emeritus: Joseph T. Bradbury and Stuart L. Thayer.

### THE FRONT COVER

This interesting John Robinson Circus lithograph was used in the early 1920s. It was printed by the Erie Lithographing Co.

The original is in the Albert Conover collection.

### NEW MEMBERS

Ted A. Hutton 4302  
2945 Smith Dr.  
Brookfield, WI 53005

Ruuala Esko 4303  
Valitie 6 D 21  
21530 Palmio, Finland

Robert E. Mike 4304  
P. O. Box 491, 3274 3rd Ct,  
Oxford, WI 53952

Madge Jennings 4305  
6421 SE Laura Ave.  
Milaukie, OR 97222

### REINSTATED

Robert Fuchs 4310  
1212 S. 20th, #21  
Richmond, IN 47374

### CHS ELECTION RESULTS

Circus Historical Society election commissioner Guy J. Fiorenza certifies the following report:

Trustees to for eight year terms.

Fred Dahlinger, Jr. 151

John H. McConnell 146

Fred D. Pfening, Jr. 155

John F. Polacsek 147

Robert F. Sabia 148

Write-ins

Joseph T. Branbury 1

Dale Riker 1

Officers for four year terms

President

Al Stencell 161

Vice President

Robert F. Sabia 158

Write in Fred D. Pfening, Jr. 1

Secretary-Treasurer

Dave Price 161

### BACK ISSUES OF BANDWAGON

1966-Jan.-Feb.

1967-July-Aug., Nov.-Dec.

1968-All but Jan.-Feb.

1969-July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.

1970-All but July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.

1971-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.

1972-All available.

1973-All but Nov.-Dec.

1974-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.

1975-All available.

1976-All but Jan.-Feb., Nov.-Dec.

1977-All but Mar.-Ap.

1978-All available.

1979-All but Jan.-Feb.

1980-1986-All available.

1987-All but Nov.-Dec.

1988-2001-All available.

Price is \$4.00 each. Add \$2.00 postage for one issue, \$5.00 for more than one issue. Please select substitutes in case we are out of any of above.

**BANDWAGON BACK ISSUES**  
2515 DORSET RD.  
COLUMBUS, OH 43221

### SEASON REVIEW

Work on the 2000 season's review in now underway. Reader's contributions will be appreciated.

Information on smaller circuses is needed. Also looking for material on large indoor sponsored circuses, as well as Vargas, Star Bros. (Majestic), Hendricks Bros. Vidbel, Cullpepper and any Mexican shows playing in the United States. An equipment listing and photos of Circo Fantastico are needed. Also reports on animal rights activities.

Needed are photos, newspaper ads and newspaper clippings.

**Forty years riding the CHS**

# BANDWAGON

**WHAT A JOY IT HAS BEEN.**

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL READERS**

**FRED D. PFENING, JR.**





# Season's Greetings

from the  
Wisconsin Historical Society's



1930 poster advertising the Robbins Bros. Circus spectacular, "Santa Claus in Fairyland," one of the 10,000 posters from Circus World Museum's collection.

550 Water Street, Baraboo, Wisconsin 53913 • 608.356.8341

[www.circusworldmuseum.com](http://www.circusworldmuseum.com) • [www.circusparade.com](http://www.circusparade.com)

Great Circus Parade and Festival • Milwaukee • July 8-14, 2002



# Herbert L. Witt & Sons, An Obscure Circus Wagon Builder

By Fred Dahlinger, Jr.

Herbert L. Witt & Sons was a local or regional wagon and carriage builder. They are of interest to us because they found a niche catering to the needs of several overland show owners that primarily toured the South during the first two decades of the twentieth century. A customer base evolved that also included the operators of developing railroad shows. It's unknown how the Witt firm came to receive their first circus commission, but they continued to be favored with orders for vehicles from traveling showmen until the wagon business collapsed after World War I. Their long-term involvement is testimony to their ability to successfully satisfy their customers needs. Many of their vehicles can now be documented, both in written and photographic documents. This knowledge has also enabled their various design signatures to be identified.

Commercial vehicle builders located in New York and Ohio dominated circus parade wagon manufacturing from the 1840s to the 1910s. George Stephenson, the Fielding brothers, and Jacob Sebastian, all of New York City, and Henry Ohlsen, Albert Bode and George Schmidt of Cincinnati were all known for their many grand circus creations. They provided the majority of the larger parade wagons to the leading shows. Their primary business was the fabrication of heavy-duty conveyances for breweries, haulage and other industries. Medium and smaller size circuses were serviced by a multitude of smaller carriage and wagon makers. Their primary activity was to fill the local commercial and private transportation needs. Any number of them made one or more circus parade wagons when a show happened to visit or winter in their community. The best-known firms of this type were Sullivan & Eagle of Peru,

Indiana and the Moeller brothers of Baraboo, Wisconsin, both of which thrived because a major circus wintered in their community, but many others could be mentioned. While the Witt firm can be considered a local or regional builder, their diverse customer base resulted from the constant touring patterns embraced by shows that catered to audiences in the South.

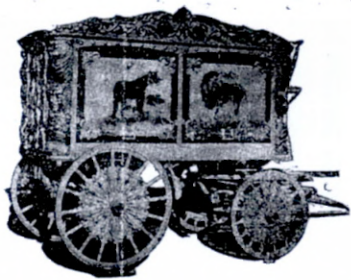
Herbert Lee Witt (c.1851-1915) operated a carriage and wagon manufacturing business in eastern Tennessee. A remark made in 1906 that the firm was "new" suggests that it was founded shortly before that date.<sup>1</sup> It supplied a number of parade wagons, cages and show fronts to various traveling shows from as early as 1905 to as late as 1920. The business was originally conducted in the small community of Morristown, about 45 miles east of Knoxville. The name of Witt's wife was Bell (probably Belle, born circa 1855, died after 1920) and together they had five children. Witt's three sons assisted him in the business. They included John N. Witt (1882-?) and Herbert L. Witt, Jr. (1888-1965). The identity of the third son is unknown.

A photograph of the Morristown shop taken about 1907 shows a well-weathered board and batten two-story barn and the attached shed that housed the firm. The twelve

men that posed in front of it likely included Witt (the author suspects he's the portly gentleman in front of the circus wagon), his sons and their workmen. Arrayed in front of the shop were representative products from the firm: buggies; a circus band-chariot; a "waffle" sided produce and ice-wagon; and other commercial vehicles. They were all similar to the carriages and wagons that were produced by dozens of other such businesses in America from the mid-nineteenth century until the advent of the automobile and internal combustion powered truck. Ads from 1911 for the firm characterized it as H. L. Witt & Sons. An envelope sent out in 1913 was imprinted H. L. Witt & Sons, Business Wagons of All Kinds," with a Morristown, Tennessee address.<sup>2</sup> The 1915 Knoxville directory, likely compiled in the latter part of the year, was the only one that listed the business under the name Chilhowee Wagon Company.

The elder Witt died unexpectedly of a hemorrhage on January 12, 1915 at his new home near Chilhowee Park, Knoxville, Tennessee and was buried there in Macedonia Cemetery

Witt sent this letterhead to William P. Hall in 1913. The attractive cage depicted therein was characteristic of the small vehicles built for overland shows. William P. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum



**H. L. WITT & SONS**  
Manufacturers of

**BUSINESS WAGONS**  
Of All Kinds

Morristown, Tenn. *Oct 8th* 1913





The only known photograph of the Witt shop is this circa 1907 view of the Morristown facility. The wagon in the background was the first Rose Kilian bandwagon. Photograph courtesy Howard C. Tibbals, print in Pfening Archives.

on January 14. One of his pallbearers was railroad carnival owner Khalil G. Barkoot. Immediately before his passing, Witt placed an advertisement that styled the firm as "Chilhowee Wagon Company, Knoxville, Tennessee . . . ready to build on short notice and at reasonable prices, circus, band, baggage, stage, living wagons, wagon fronts and ticket boxes, all sizes, cages, dens, calliopes, chariots, tableaux and Roman chariots, any size or design." Herbert Witt, shop manager and presumably the recently-deceased owner, was

A tableau, four cages and a January mule cart were among the vehicles that Witt furnished to the McDonald Bros. New United Shows about 1906. Tom Jobe photograph, Bernard Hastings collection, Circus World Museum.



cited as the contact.<sup>3</sup> It is unknown if the firm was moved to the larger city to assure and support its survival and growth, as if Witt's demise was anticipated, or if the move and press of business caused such stress that it claimed Witt's life.

Chilhowee (pronounced chill-oh-we locally) was the name of an amusement park located in Knoxville, Tennessee, on East Magnolia, about two to three miles from the downtown area. Prof. F. C. Beaman, a relocated New Yorker, created it as a resort in 1886, damming some springs to form Beaman's Lake and later arranging to have two streetcar lines reach the property. It appears in a list of amusement parks compiled in 1905 and by 1908 was acquired by the Knoxville Railway & Light Company, being in essence a so-called trolley park at the end of the streetcar line. By 1910, when the first of three large expositions were staged at the site, the area was well known as Chilhowee Park, but the origin of the name has not been determined. By October 1916 it was leased to the committee of civic-

minded citizens who staged the first East Tennessee Division Fair. A member of that group, James G. Sterchi, bought the place in 1920 and preserved it as a site for the fair, earning him the right to rename it Sterchi Park. By 1943 the land belonged to the city of Knoxville. A variety of concessionaires subsequently booked their mechanical rides there through the years.

The nature of the relationship between the park and Witt is unknown, but it was undoubtedly related to K. G. Barkoot's involvement with the facility. Barkoot moved his personal residence to Knoxville in late 1913. Though he wintered his carnival in Mobile, Alabama, Barkoot opened it in Knoxville in the spring of 1914, not at Chilhowee but on the old circus grounds on East Jackson Avenue. In 1915 Barkoot was listed as the President of the Chilhowee Wagon Company, which was located on Rutledge Pike in Chilhowee Park. Barkoot's Funway was the midway at the initial 1916 fair and he had a lease on the park in 1917 when he offered it to the government as a site for a military training camp.<sup>4</sup> It certainly appears that Barkoot played a pivotal role in relocating the Witt firm to Knoxville, close to his own home base of operations.

Knoxville directories listed the firm as the Witt Wagon Company in 1916 and 1917. The principals were John N. and Herbert L. Witt, Jr. The operation was located at 833-835 Morgan Street, on downtown Knoxville's north edge. The family firm was continued but the brothers reduced its scope of operations. Soon thereafter, in 1919, both Witts were listed as painters employed at the Quality Carriage Company at 2300 North Central, near the old shop.

The Witt brothers' last known solicitation for show wagon work was an ad in the October 15, 1921 issue of the *Billboard* (page 84). Illustrated with the same small cage wagon cut used years before, the firm was then characterized as "The Witt Bros., Cor. Central & Broad, Knoxville, Tenn." It's doubtful that there was much business to be gained from shows at that late date, even from the smaller overland circuses. Most outfits were

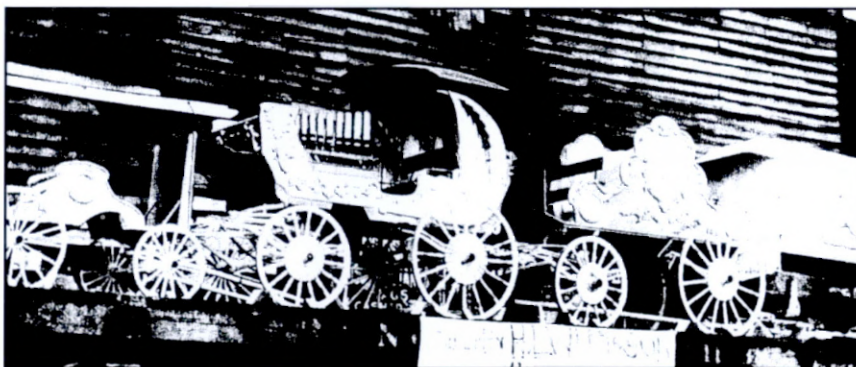


then converting to trucks, if they wanted to survive. Both brothers worked for Brantley Bros., an automobile repair business, by 1922. Herbert, Jr. carried on the family business, converting it over to an auto paint shop in Knoxville by the mid 1920s. At the time he was considering a move to Huntington, West Virginia. Both Witts had moved away from the area by 1930. Herbert relocated to Covington, Kentucky and worked for 25 years for the Cincinnati Gas & Electric Company. John Witt moved to California but the time of his death has not been determined. Neither he, nor his family, was mentioned in his brother's 1965 obituary.

The Witt wagon work was quite satisfactory for smaller and medium shows, and had a pleasing appearance. Their parade wagons often featured repetitive carved elements, suggesting that perhaps samples or patterns were bought and then reproduced multiple times by shop workers. The carvings may also have been purchased in quantity, at a discount, after being identified in trade catalogs. A few vehicles had an ornamentation that must have been procured from a skilled carver, or devised by someone with basic knowledge of carving techniques.

Witt's show customers included circus men like the McDonald brothers, J. Augustus Jones, the Sun brothers, Rose Kilian and Ernest Haag, and carnival sheiks like K. G. Barkoot and Johnny J. Jones. These proprietors, either overland or ascending railroad showmen, did not buy conveyances from major New York or Cincinnati builders. Following the first successful order completion, it appears that mostly word of mouth became the means by which the Witts came to be known in the business. That important first order may have come from a small overland show quartered in Huntington, West Virginia that likely perambulated into Morristown during 1904.

The McDonald brothers, announced in the trade press as William R., Harry and Will S., were, as far as is known, Witt's first show customers. In reality, Harry



McDonald was one Tom Jobe, who had a brother Bill Jobe. Tom Jobe's name appears on the back of several original cabinet photographs now in the Circus World Museum collections, confirming his identity. The Jobe brothers partner was one Jim Brackman, who operated the sideshow. They organized the McDonald Bros. New United Shows, a small overland operation, in Huntington in the spring of 1904. It moved on fourteen wagons and buggies, said to be all new. The advance wagon and a carryall were delivered new to the show by O[tto] Armleder & Company, a large Cincinnati carriage manufacturer that was established in 1883 and incorporated in 1894. These vehicles were nothing special, being part of the regular Armleder line.<sup>6</sup>

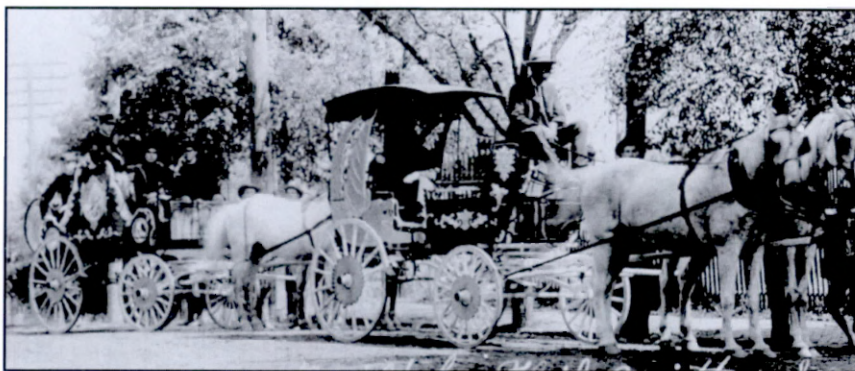
The McDonald-titled outfit opened the 1905 season in Athens, Georgia. By mid-year they had completed an eastern route and then worked south, with a plan to spend part of it in Tennessee. By July they claimed to have all new wagons, including six baggage wagons received from Witt. Initially short of workingmen, to attract them they introduced the concept of sleeping wagons having

This circa 1907 carload from Witt included a small steam calliope, a chariot and presumably a sleeper wagon that was built on a city teaming gear for the McDonald show. Tom Jobe photograph, Bernard Hastings collection, Circus World Museum.

individual berths with bedding for each man. At the beginning of the 1905 season they stated that there were ten baggage and five sleeping wagons on the show. From photographs, it appears that the sleeping wagons may have been nothing more than low-sided boxes with canvas canopies that were conveyed on city teaming gears. With the box removed, they could be readily adapted or sold for general haulage purposes.<sup>7</sup>

The McDonald outfit arrived in Morristown on June 27, 1906 and laid over for three weeks of rest and repairs. Before the show left town on July 7, it was claimed that it had doubled in size and that four new cages and three tableau wagons were ordered from Witt. One of the Jobe

The Witt built McDonald bandwagon and calliope in parade. Pfening Archives.





photographs records five Witt-built overland cages and a January mule cart, perhaps on the streets of Huntington. They were largely decorated with a profusion of small scrolls and associated decorative elements. Another 1906 Jobe photo shows twelve baggage (open) and sleeping (closed) wagons that were furnished by Witt.<sup>8</sup>

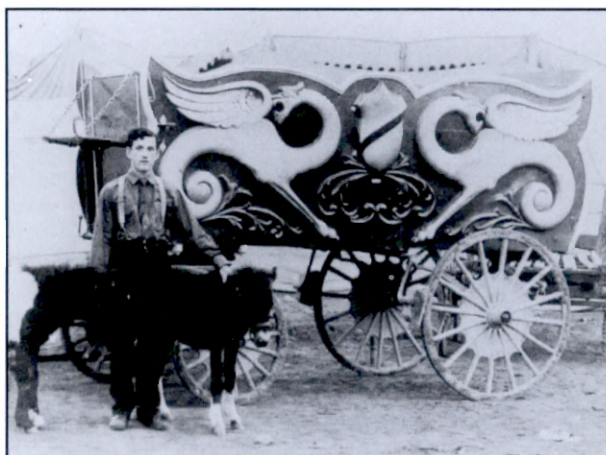
Two photographs document a set of small wagons that Witt shipped by flat car to the McDonald outfit, likely a 1907 commission. We have chosen that date because none of them appear in the earlier McDonald photography or in trade journal accountants. The vehicles included a bandwagon, a calliope, a January mule cart and a covered dray wagon, possibly one of the heralded sleeping wagons. The bandwagon had three port-hole-like mirrors to enhance its sides. A simply executed winged beast, appearing to disgorge steam, decorated the calliope, along with the usual scrolls. The calliope instrument was one of George Kratz's small devices, supplied with steam by a small kerosene fired boiler. The wagons were the constituent elements of the McDonald street parade and made a nice flash in the smaller communities that the show visited.

The McDonald show ownership was reorganized in Huntington in late 1907, with Harvey Q. Shallcross, James D. Harrison and Harry McDonald listed as the new owners. It is suspected that Shallcross and Harrison were the angels for Jobe's continuing show business ambitions. Big plans were announced for 1908, including an April 18 opening, but the show may not have left the barn. An unexplained document survives from early 1908. Someone signing his name as John G. Robinson on a McDonald Bros. letterhead sent an inquiry dated May 25, 1908 to William P. Hall. They were inquiring about elephants and could be addressed care of the McDonald show. The significance of the letter and the demise of the McDonald wagons remains unknown.<sup>9</sup>

The next known Witt customer was a circus managed by one of the few female owners in American history. Rose Kilian Southern Shows

was a modest overland outfit that toured continuously, as did others in the South. There was no need to adopt a winter lay off. It was operated by Rose[nal] Weber Kilian (1870-1936) and her husband, John Justis Kilian (1860-circa 1926). He also went by the name Jack Brown and perhaps other aliases. He was frequently identified as Mrs. Killian's brother, despite the fact that all of her children looked like him. His obscured status apparently resulted from a head injury that he suffered in a circus clem, when he was beaten with a stake. He was never the same afterwards. The Kilians had at least three daughters: Rosena Kilian (stage name Rosa Rosaland, 1890-1950, wife of Clint V. Meyers), a very accomplished equestrienne; Ruth, ?-1920, wife of E. P. Sawyer; Mabel; a son, Otto W., who managed the show in the early 1920s; and an older adopted son, George. The seven members of the Kilian family (including the young Otto, who appeared as a girl in the ring) were hired by the McDonald show for the 1904 tour. They may have been exposed to Witt wagons sometime during their association with that outfit.

At one time the Kilian troupe was part of Mont Moranzo's "American Circus" back end show on the K. G. Barkoot carnival. Moranzo, or



Witt furnished a second bandchariot to the Rose Kilian show sometime before about 1915. The young man may well be one of the Kilian boys, perhaps Otto. Hardy O'Neal scrapbook, Circus World Museum.

Morinzo, had a variety outfit called the Treble Stage Palace (also Pavilion) Shows on tour in 1903. There is also reference to Rose Kilian's service as a back end circus show with the Seeman-Millican (also Millican) Mardi Gras carnival company that was documented for 1904-1905. Rose booked her family on the Mighty Haag Show in 1905, but at Monticello, Kentucky there was a falling out and the family departed, all except for the mysterious husband. At least two of the Kilian daughters, Rose and Mabel,

The largest box body wagon with the Kilian show was the ticket wagon, embellished with a multitude of repetitive wooden decorations. Circus World Museum.







The small bandchariot that served on various Jones brothers shows in the 1910s has Witt-style panel wheels and carved serpents that resemble those on a 1913 Sparks wagon. Pfening Archives

were placed with the John Robinson's Ten Big Shows later in the season. Following about a month of performances given at the local courthouse and hosting a school in physical culture, Rose launched her own traveling enterprise in Monticello as the Kilian Family Musical Comedy Show. They started with a small round top, a few seats and played every crossroads in Wayne County, Kentucky, along with some of the schools. The Kilians had their own full-fledged circus by 1907, but that same year Ruth Kilian was listed as a clown with the Mighty Haag, likely accompanied by her father. After over two decades of near continuous showing, it appears that the Kilian show closed about 1929. Reportedly abandoned by her children and robbed several times over the years, Rose spent her last two or three years on the road with Ernest Haag's overland show, their rift many years before having healed.<sup>10</sup>

The Witt shop photograph shows a small bandchariot with the Rose Kilian Shows title on it. This commission would have been performed no earlier than circa 1907. A year after he built three tableaux for the Sparks circus, Witt later built a second, more elaborate bandchariot for the Kilian show. This 1914 wagon featured a pair of griffins on the side that were remarkably similar to those on one of the Sparks vehicles.

cession to the muddy condition of southern roads. Panels extending the full distance would have become excessively soiled and presented a burdensome cleaning chore. Larger panels may also have made it more difficult to turn wheels in rutted roads, the panels acting like vanes or rudders in the bottomless quagmires.

Other vehicles furnished by Witt in 1914 were the ticket wagon and a carry-us-all, some type of carriage. The ticket wagon can be seen in various Kilian show prints. Such a vehicle was the largest box wagon on most overland shows and served a multitude of duties including parade, haulage, ticket sales and office. It was embellished with repetitive carvings in a pattern that suggests use of a scroll or bandsaw in their manufacture. Tom M. Woodward, who tramped with Kilian from 1912 to 1914, was one of several men that were dispatched with show mules from Austinville to Decatur, Alabama, about nine miles distant, to pick up the flat car load of wagons furnished by Witt. They included the ticket wagon, a bandwagon, a cage wagon for the old lion Romero and a carry us all. He particularly remembered the carry us all, describing it as a hack with a top and seats all around, and having a back step. It could hold about fifteen people and served as a principal means to transport show personnel between engagements. Woodward recalled that the wagon wheels were outfitted with "sun fleets" that made a "klikker" sound as they rolled along. The klikker sound probably originated from relative motion between the wheel spokes and the sunburst pan-

The wheels of the Kilian bandwagon clearly revealed another Witt trademark. The panels between the spokes filled only a fraction, about half, of the distance between the hub and the felloes. The design may

have been a concession to the muddy condition of southern roads. Panels extending the full distance would have become excessively soiled and presented a burdensome cleaning chore. Larger panels may also have made it more difficult to turn wheels in rutted roads, the panels acting like vanes or rudders in the bottomless quagmires.

Other vehicles furnished by Witt in 1914 were the ticket wagon and a carry-us-all, some type of carriage. The ticket wagon can be seen in various Kilian show prints. Such a vehicle was the largest box wagon on most overland shows and served a multitude of duties including parade, haulage, ticket sales and office. It was embellished with repetitive carvings in a pattern that suggests use of a scroll or bandsaw in their manufacture. Tom M. Woodward, who tramped with Kilian from 1912 to 1914, was one of several men that were dispatched with show mules from Austinville to Decatur, Alabama, about nine miles distant, to pick up the flat car load of wagons furnished by Witt. They included the ticket wagon, a bandwagon, a cage wagon for the old lion Romero and a carry us all. He particularly remembered the carry us all, describing it as a hack with a top and seats all around, and having a back step. It could hold about fifteen people and served as a principal means to transport show personnel between engagements. Woodward recalled that the wagon wheels were outfitted with "sun fleets" that made a "klikker" sound as they rolled along. The klikker sound probably originated from relative motion between the wheel spokes and the sunburst pan-

els affixed between them.<sup>11</sup>

On April 15, 1918, Kilian wrote to William P. Hall offering her entire show for sale. Both of her sons had been drafted for military duty and she lacked adequate help to get the show moved as a result of the wartime conditions. Surprisingly, she admitted to "being a woman and getting old." She was of the opinion that "This is a great bargain to anyone to invest in a good wagon show." The ten show vehicles included these: ticket wagon; sleeper wagon; stringer wagon; side show wagon; trunk wagon; cook wagon; pole wagon; jack wagon; advance wagon; lion cage. The listings were not unlike those that Tony Agler (Parker) enumerated as being on an overland show in the mid-19th century.<sup>12</sup> It would not be surprising to learn that the Witts had built the majority of the Kilian wagons and carriages. The Witt wagons likely served the Kilian show until the end and may have simply been abandoned, worn out after years of overland travel.

Witt's obituary states that he produced wagons for J. Augustus Jones (1868-1918), a showman known for operating two-car shows and also for being the first circus owner to have an entirely steel show train. Jones started with a modest overland operation in the early 1890s and moved to one car status about 1895. For years he and his brother Elmer H. (1873-1962) made a considerable amount of money with multiple two-car operations, but in the 1910s they also operated larger flat car circuses and a wild west. It's likely that they ordered wagons from Witt for one or more of the two-car shows that moved with a tunnel car, perhaps one time when Jones played the eastern part of Tennessee. Though they were from northwest Pennsylvania, the Joneses knew where they could make money with their closely managed shows. In 1913 Jones opened his two-car New Empire Railroad Show in Knoxville, placing him close to the Witt operation.

Our search for written documentation associating Witt with Jones was unsuccessful. At best we can point out a cage photographed at Tonopah,



Nevada in the early 1910s that appears to have Witt-style corner post and scroll carvings, and half-panel wheels. It would not be a stretch to hypothesize that the small bandchariot that was initially used on the Joneses' two-car Cole & Rogers show in 1911 was also a Witt vehicle. It was with their Stone & Murray outfit in 1914 and then served as an air calliope wagon on the Joneses big Cole Bros. flat car show through 1918. The serpent-like figures on it are similar in configuration to the beasts applied to a 1913 ticket wagon that the Witts built for Charlie Sparks. It also had the half-panel wheels like those on other Witt wagons. Elmer Jones wrote that he sold the Cole air calliope to Jess Adkins (1886-1940), but when and where he may have used it has not been determined.<sup>13</sup> It is likely that some Witt-built cages from the Jones operations were later acquired by Ernest Haag. Our observation is based on the appearance of three of them in a photograph taken at the Haag quarters about April 1918.

One of the most progressive and successful carnival owners of the 1910s and 1920s was Johnny J. Jones (1874-1930). Witt built a fancy tiger cage with elaborate carvings for the 25-car Jones Exposition in 1911. It was likely the same one captured in a pair of photos that W. H. B. Jones took on the Jones carnival in 1917. The corner post carvings of this wagon align it with Witt.<sup>14</sup> At that

Witt built this Johnny J. Jones cage wagon in 1911. The corner post carvings align it with other Witt creations. Photo by W. H. B. Jones, circa 1917.



time it housed a bear act for Jones's big train-ended wild animal back end show. In addition to housing animals, the cage may have served as an element of the street parades that were staged by the Jones midway. It is not known if Witt delivered other show wagons to Jones, who also had a very simple mirrored tableau wagon at the time.

Witt's obituary notice stated that he "was noted throughout the country for his experience in building wagon fronts." As late as 1921 his sons advertised show fronts "built to order" and stage wagons that were used for carnival back end shows. Unfortunately none of Witt showfront customers have been identified except for one. K. G. Barkoot (1878-1948) was Witt's biggest single customer. At the time of Witt's death, Barkoot was said to have had an open \$10,000 order placed with him. One wonders if Barkoot brokered the fronts that Witt fabricated to other traveling showmen. Starting with the season of 1912, the firm eventually fabricated at least eight large two-wagon show fronts for the carnival sheik. Barkoot opened his show in Knoxville on April 14, 1914 and the Witt-made show fronts, illuminated by two



hundred 10-watt tungsten lamps, made a fine appearance before the locals. A photograph of the fronts, lined up in a row, was taken at the time and printed over two pages of the May 2, 1914 issue of *The Billboard* (pages 4-5).

Witt manufactured three large tableaus for Charles Sparks in 1913. This one also doubled as a ticket wagon and is the only existing Witt wagon. Robert and Brian Heber gift, Circus World Museum.

Several of the Witt show fronts remained in use with K. G. Barkoot's World's Greatest Shows operation as late as 1922, and presumably even later.<sup>15</sup>

Witt received what we would judge to be his most important railroad circus commission from Charles Sparks (1876?-1949) for 1913. Other than the show front wagons for Barkoot and the Jones animal cage, these may have been the first big railroad show wagons made in Morristown and would have been a real feather in Witt's hat. The order consisted of three large tableau wagons with carved ornamentation, all of which served as bandwagons in parade. Each could carry a full load of baggage and one of them also doubled as the show's ticket wagon and office. That vehicle, pre-served at Circus World Museum and recently rebuilt to its appearance on Sparks in the 1910s, is the sole surviving example of the firm's circus work. The story of these three wagons will be developed in a subsequent article about the Sparks circus. The corner post carvings on a Sparks lion cage photographed in 1919 suggests that Witt may have delivered other vehicles to Charlie Sparks, who wintered his cir-



cus in Salisbury, North Carolina at the time of the 1913 Witt order.

On October 8, 1913, Witt wrote William H. Hall at the behest of John A. "Kid" Barton (?-1921), who was then associated with Sig Sautelle (1848-1928). Barton had the candy stands and privilege car on Sautelle's circus. Witt had four miniature cages in stock, with flashy colors and sunburst wheels and measuring five feet long by 34 inches wide and high. They were available for \$100 each. Perhaps they were vehicles that Witt planned to repossess from Sautelle's operation.<sup>16</sup>

The Sun brothers were four northwestern Ohio boys that entered the circus business in 1892. Their actual family name, Klotz, did not have the necessary show biz ring to it so they went with Sun, which could utilize a shining sun and other visual and verbal illusions effectively in marketing. The one brother that stuck it out to the end in 1918 was Pete (1872-1961). The year before George (1862-1917) dropped out. Two others left much earlier, John (1858-1941) in about 1896 and Gus (1868-1959) after 1898. They went on rails in the mid-1890s and for many years made it a practice not to stage a daily free street parade. A view does survive of a Sun Bros. bandchariot, a simple vehicle decorated with paint but devoid of carvings. By 1905 they had established winter quarters in Savannah, Georgia and in 1907 shifted to Macon.

In 1913 the Sun Bros. World's Progressive Shows moved on nine cars. During the winter of 1913-1914 they engaged H. L. Witt & Sons to make four cross cages and one larger cage. The activity is mentioned twice in trade paper accounts but the name of the builder would remain unknown were it not for the advertisement that the Witts placed in the Sun brothers' 1913 route book. The



Another of the Sparks tableaus featured carved griffins of the same design as those applied to the second Kilian bandwagon. Two of these wagons later served on circuses operated by the King brothers. Pfening Archives.

writer of the Witt ad optimistically claimed that "All of the 1914 Cages, dens and Vehicles Used by Sun Brothers' Shows are from the Factories of H. L. Witt & Sons," but the actual truth was much more limiting. After the end of the 1914 season, Pete Sun wrote William P. Hall offering the entire Sun outfit for sale. His description of the assets revealed the scope of the Witt work as "5 New Cages built last winter cost \$2,000.00." The wheel skirts and outside sunburst wheels indicate that the Bode Wagon Company and not Witt built the new \$1,000 ticket wagon. As for the eleven new baggage wagons, Sun noted that they built them all in Macon winter quarters for \$300 each, when builders wanted \$450 for their equal.<sup>17</sup> The only known view of the cages is an image that appears in the Sun Bros. 1913 route book (page 2), but in order to have been the 1914 cages the route book publication must have been delayed until after their delivery.

Pete Sun retired after the 1918

tour and offered the show for sale piecemeal. The four Witt cross cages were priced out at \$175 each and the large lion den at \$350, with all of them available at a lot price of \$1,000. In early 1919 the four cross cages could still be bought. In a pencilled list compiled at the time of the sale, Sun assigned values of \$100 to the lion den and \$200 for the four small cages. The buyers of the Witt cages has not been identified.<sup>18</sup>

Show work continued in a limited fashion after the elder Witt's death in 1915. On one trip north in early 1920, long time southern circus man Ernest Haag (1866-1935) stopped in Knoxville and favored Witt Bros. with an order for six cages.<sup>19</sup> He had previously purchased similar cages from the Beggs firm, located in Kansas City, but had also bought four cages, some of Witt manufacture, at the sale of J. Augustus Jones show in Shreveport on February 26, 1918.

Haag started his show with \$20.00 and a flatboat on the Red River about 1893 and literally picked up performers as he floated along. He reached his zenith with a fine railroad show from 1909 to 1914, but is best remembered for his overland operations. Haag, billing his show as the "Mighty Haag," was something of a folksy legend, a friendly character who established an enduring relationship with many communities that his show visited. Some people simply called him "The Mighty," in a reverent way. In terms of the nature of his show, it was of the same format as the McDonald and Kilian circuses, except financially more successful. Photographs of the Haag show taken in the early 1920s depict at least four small overland cages that were likely made in the Witt shop. All of the cages had carved corner decorations and panel wheels that were similar





to those on earlier Witt wagons. These vehicles were among those that were later abandoned when the show converted to truck operation at the show's Marianna, Florida quarters. They went to pieces in the tropical climate.

The author extends his grateful appreciation to Steve Cotham and Danette Welch of the Knox County Public Library for their assistance in researching the history of the Witt family and Chilhowee park, and to Stuart Thayer for his review of the manuscript.

#### Notes

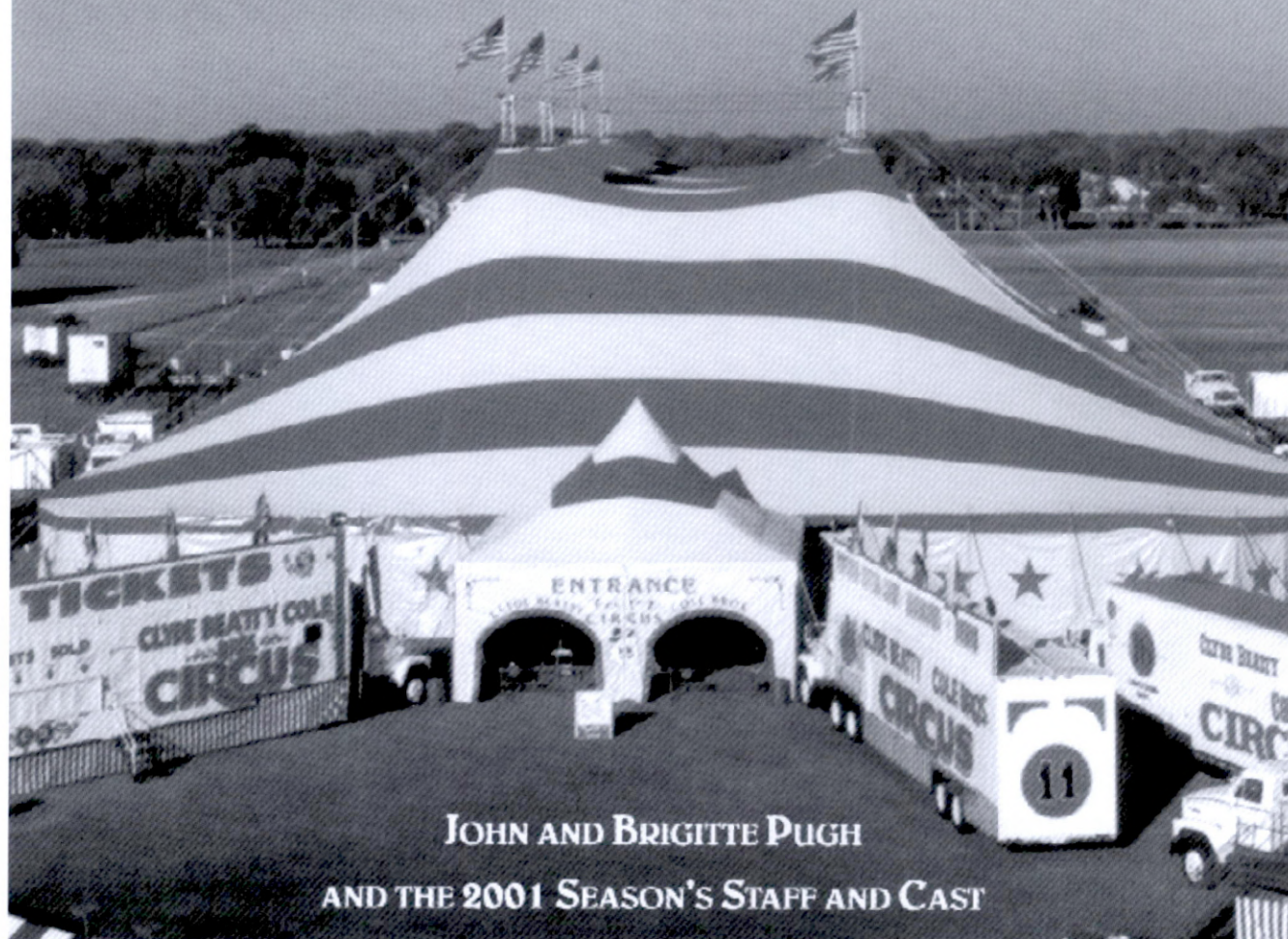
1. There is a town in Hamblen County, Tennessee named Witt, about five miles south of Morristown. It was named for Christopher Witt (1820-1899), who operated Witt's Foundry. The name was affixed to a county post office after 1870 and changed to Witt in 1924. It appears to be unrelated to the Witts covered here. *The Billboard*, August 11, 1906, page 26.
2. *The Billboard*, March 18, 1911, page 64c; William P. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.
3. *The Billboard*, January 23, 1915, page 57; January 30, 1915, page 23. There are no records available for the cemetery.
4. *Midway*, I, 7 (June 1905), page 36; the *Billboard*, November 29, 1913, page 126; July 25, 1914, page 46; April 28, 1917, page 33.
5. *The Billboard*, January 31, 1925, page 76.
6. *The New York Clipper*, March 19, 1904, page 86; April 23, 1904, page 190; the *Billboard*, January 24, 1948, page 68, quoting the Huntington (WV) *Herald-Advertiser* of December 21, 1948. Huntington circus collector Bernard Hastings provided the link between the Jobe family and Circus World Museum; *The Billboard*, March 19, 1904, page 9 and e-
7. *The Billboard*, July 29, 1905, page 17; May 6, 1905, page 19. Hyatt Frost introduced the idea of a camp wagon arrangement on the Van Amburgh show in 1870 and perhaps others attempted it before him. See Thomas Frost, *Circus Life and Circus Celebrities* (Tinsley Bros., 1876), page 239. Photographs of the McDonald show on the lot are in the *New York Clipper*, May 20, 1905, page 323 and the *Billboard*, August 5, 1905, page 16, and other scenes are in the Circus World Museum collections.
8. *The Billboard*, August 11, 1906, page 26. Huntington was to be played on August 29.
9. *The Billboard*, December 28, 1907, page 35; William P. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.
10. The Kilian biographical information was contained in a letter composed by son Otto Kilian on July 11, 1965 and found in the Hertzberg Circus Collection files by Dan Draper, who kindly provided the information. Other Kilian family and show information is contained in letters from Tom M. Woodward to George L. Chindahl dated June 4, 1952, June 15, 1952 and other correspondence between Chindahl, Tom Parkinson and Fred B. Thompson in the Chindahl and Parkinson Papers at Circus World Museum. Also see the *Billboard*, March 19, 1904, page 9; December 10, 1910, page 59; July 1, 1922, page 63; February 28, 1925, page 74; November 16, 1929, page 56; September 2, 1944, page 55; and *New York Clipper*, March 14, 1903, page 74; October 10, 1903, page 790; and July 13, 1907, page 565.
11. A photograph of the wagon on the Kilian show is in *Bandwagon*, March-April 1958, page 3. Also see *Billboard*, February 14, 1914, page 62 and *Bandwagon*, July-August 1968, page 18; November-December 1980, page 43.
12. Tony Agler (Parker), *On the Road With a Wagon Show 53 Years* (Winfield, Kansas, the author, 1910), page 14. The only known original copy of this book is at Circus World Museum.
13. Photographs, *Bandwagon*, March-April 1977, pages 6 and 11; letter from Elmer H. Jones to Tom Parkinson dated February 6, 1938, Tom Parkinson Papers, Circus World Museum.
14. *Billboard*, May 27, 1911, page 26.
15. *Billboard*, January 30, 1915, page 43; *ibid*; February 10, 1912, page 21; November 29, 1913, page 126; May 2, 1914, page 25. A Barkoot biography and portrait is in Joe McKennon's, *Pictorial History of the American Carnival* (1972), Vol. II, page 37. Three of the show fronts appear in the Eli Bridge Company's house publication, *The Optimist*, September 1922, page 135.
16. William P. Hall Papers, Circus World Museum.
17. *Billboard*, January 31, 1914, page 24; April 4, 1914, page 23; route book, page 25; letter from Pete Sun to William P. Hall dated November 21, 1914, William P. Hall papers, Circus World Museum.
18. *Billboard*, November 23, 1918, page 58; January 11, 1919, page 4; notation in William P. Hall papers, Circus World Museum.
19. *Billboard*, January 17, 1920, page 58.



# Peace on Earth Good Will Toward Men

TO EACH AND ALL OF OUR FRIENDS IN NEW YORK CITY,  
ACROSS THE NATION,  
AND FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

CLYDE  
BEATTY~  
**COLE BROS.**  
WORLD'S LARGEST  
**CIRCUS**  
UNDER  
THE BIG TOP!



JOHN AND BRIGITTE PUGH  
AND THE 2001 SEASON'S STAFF AND CAST



# BIG APPLE CIRCUS

all new show!

Big  
Top

Doo-  
Wop



Season's  
Greetings!

Sponsored by



CIGNA HealthCare

## 2001-2002 TOUR ROUTE

Washington, D.C.....Sep 20 - Oct 8, 2001  
New York, NY.....Oct 18 - Jan 6, 2002  
Atlanta, GA .....Feb - Mar 2002  
Bridgewater, NJ .....Mar 2002  
Boston, MA .....Apr - May 2002

Queens, NY.....May 2002  
Brookville, NY.....May - June 2002  
Rockland County, NY.....June - July 2002  
Charlestown, RI .....Jul 2002  
Hanover, NH .....Jul 2002



*All dates and locations subject to change*

**For more information visit [bigapplecircus.org](http://bigapplecircus.org) or call (800) 899-2775**



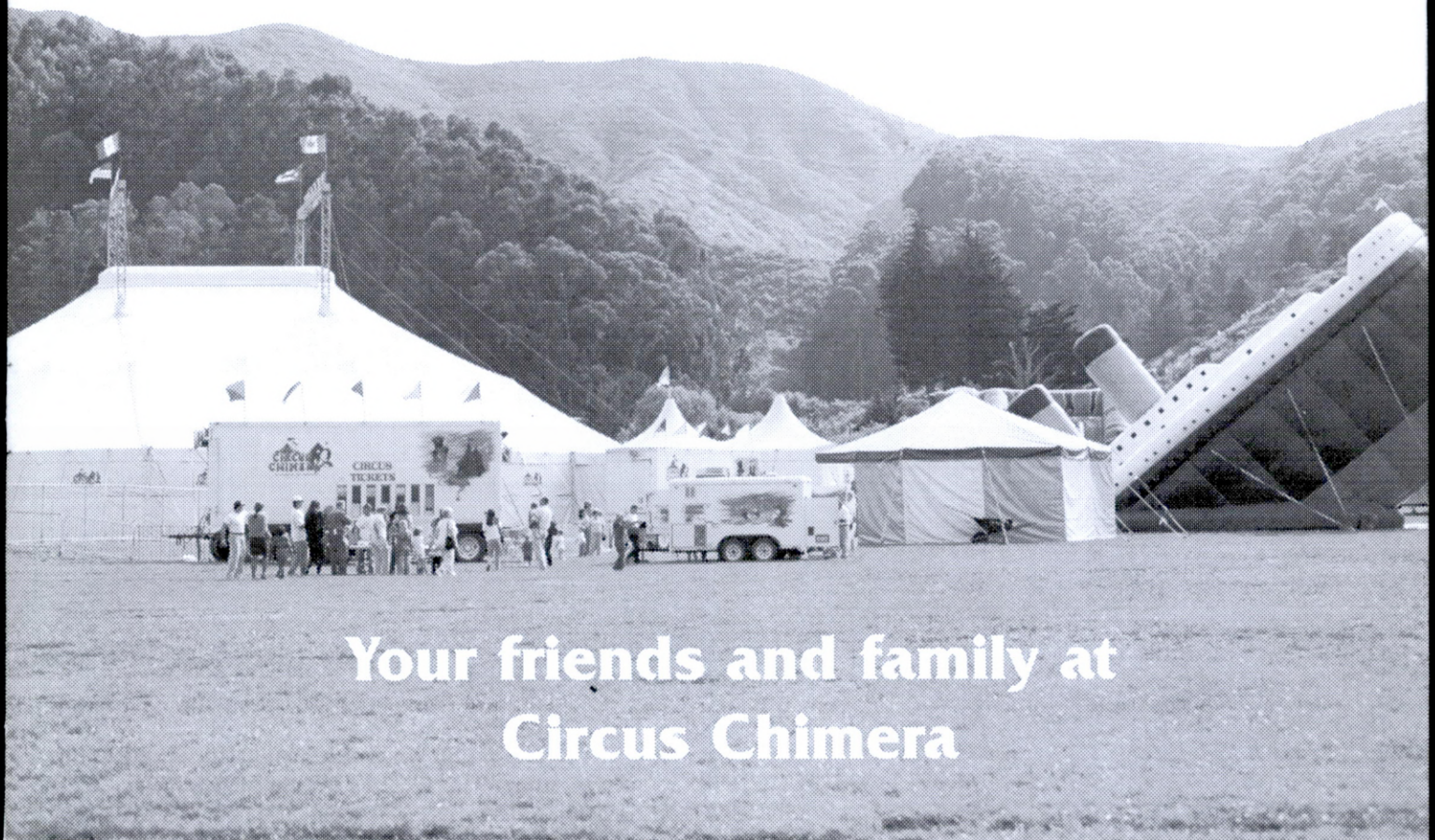
**To All Our Circus Friends**  
*Blue Skies, Grassy Lots*  
*and Especially Straw Houses For 2002*



*Baby Jennie &*  
*The Carson & Barnes Circus Family*



**The family of circus is one family.  
The family of man is one family.  
In this time of strife,  
remember to cherish your family.  
Count your blessings this Holiday Season.  
They are many.**



**Your friends and family at  
Circus Chimera**



# GREAT AMERICAN RIDERS

## 1. Levi J. North, "America's Own Horseman"

By Stuart Thayer

One of the few physical descriptions we have of early nineteenth century traveling circuses is that of the 1826 Washington Circus, owned by Isaac Quick and Abraham Mead. Having this knowledge of it, makes the show an important part of circus history. But beyond knowing it physical makeup, the company is important for two other reasons. The least of these is the fact that the circus used a canvas tent as its theater. In 1826 there were but four troupes so equipped, Brown & Bailey, who had introduced the circus tent in 1825, and three firms that adopted tents in 1826, Howes & Turner; John Miller, and the Washington Circus.

More importantly, at least to the future of the business, was Quick and Mead's taking on a twelve-year old apprentice by the name of Levi James North. This boy thus began a career that proved to be one of the greatest in circus history. Over a forty-year period he was to reach the heights of critical acclaim, and public popularity through his athletic grace as a standing rider.

This was the initial season for the Washington Circus, though the managers both had prior experience. As with all the small troupes of the era, this one depended on a roster fined with apprentices. In addition to North, they were James Raymond, Master DeGroot, George Nichols, and a lad named Worth. The advantage to the owners in this system was that apprentices received no pay beyond pocket money. They were given room, board and instruction as remuneration for learning the trade. They also did much of the labor, such as raising the tent, grooming the horses, and working on the master's farm in the winter.

North was born in New Town

(now Newton), Long Island, on 16 June 1814. He was the only son of Jeremiah North (c-1775 - c-1825) and Elizabeth Edsall (1786-1856).<sup>1</sup> The fact that Levi left home in the year after his father's death may indicate that he wished to relieve his mother of the burden of his support.

In addition to North and his contemporaries, the troupe carried the adult riders Sam Stickney and William Lawson. Chris Hughes was the clown, and Reuben French the agent. There were seven horses and a pony. These were Romeo and Juliet, trick horses, ones that performed without a rider; Fanny, the Billy Button act horse, performing in the oldest comic riding act known; Lilly, a mare used to train apprentices, and on which North learned to ride; Lady, another mare; Arab, described as a "Kannuck" horse, that is, from

Drawing of Levi J. North in action. Friedlander Collection.



Canada, which Stickney rode; Doctor, which pulled the sole wagon, and the pony Bob, later used in the Button act.

The wagon carried the tent, a fifty-foot round. The ring fence and the side poles may have been loaded in a hired dray; this was so in 1827. A new center pole was purchased at each stand. No mention was made of seating, as it was with other tented shows, and may mean that there was none.<sup>2</sup>

According to John Dingess, their season began in Brooklyn,<sup>3</sup> and according to the New York Clipper, they purchased a show at the Military Garden in that city.<sup>4</sup> There is no contemporary reference to this.

Day quoted North as saying that the company left New York by schooner on 2 September 1826, and arrived in Richmond, Virginia on 11 September. We found no newspaper announcement of their presence in Richmond. Quick and Mead had an interest in a menagerie

in this same season. It was managed by Jeremiah P. Fogg and Epenetus Howe, and featured the elephant, Columbus. The two shows were combined in Richmond, and later in Columbia, South Carolina.<sup>5</sup> It does not appear that they traveled together, nor that they shared the same lots. The circus played in Raleigh, North Carolina, as it was there that North first stood on a horse's back, the beginning of his riding career. The training method of the time called for the boy to hold onto a rawhide strap, while the trainer ran beside the horse. He was not trained as a bareback rider, but used a pad, and in fact was a pad rider throughout his career. The



English rider, James Hunter, had introduced Bareback riding to America in 1822. The first American practitioner was Sam Tatnall (b.c 1799), who learned the turn in 1823. For some years, there was no distinction made between the two types of presentation, but in time pad riding came to be thought of as a lesser art, at least in America. After five or six days of practice, Levi North made his debut before the public in Camden, South Carolina. Day described him as jumping a whip,<sup>6</sup> and finishing with a waving of flags. By the time the circus reached Columbia, South Carolina, in December, North was daily turning a somersault to the ground from the back of a moving horse.

One of the programs presented in Columbia has survived (they were there most of the month) and it proved to be as follows:

1. Grand Entree of the beautiful horses.
2. Horsemanship by Master Raymond (including jumping through a balloon).
3. Running Vaulting by the entire company.
4. Metamorphosis of the Sack by Mi. Stickney.
5. Song by Mr. Lawson.
6. Ground and Lofty tumbling by Mr. Stickney and the apprentices.
7. Slack Rope by Master Kelly.
8. Horsemanship by Mr. Stickney.
9. Slack Rope by Mr. Hughes.<sup>7</sup>

In Columbia the circus constructed a board-sided pavilion with a canvas top. The menagerie joined them there, bringing with them Columbus, a lion, a tiger, and a pony-riding monkey, or Dandy Jack. The keeper of the elephant was a black man named Bin. There were at least three performers traveling with the menagerie, George Nichols, who later introduced minstrelsy into the circus, William Kelly mentioned above, and Paddy Wells, a singer.

The two shows moved to Augusta, Georgia, and set up in opposition to each other. The circus opened on 10 January 1827, and was duly advertised in the *Augusta Chronicle*, but no notice of the menagerie appeared. The Dandy Jack, or pony-riding simian, made an appearance in the circus ring on closing night, 12 February.

During the winter Mr. Lawson left, and was replaced by the Englishman John Rogers, who brought along his talented son, Charles J. Rogers. Young Rogers and North were both future stars of the arena. The well-known wire-walker, Dan Minnich also joined. We mention these names to illustrate how in his apprenticeship North met so many of the people he would perform with in the coming years. Sharing the hardships of touring made for friendships in the close-knit fraternity of field shows.

The circus moved from Augusta to Savannah near to February 2. The menagerie took Columbus to Charleston a month earlier. When Quick and Mead reached Savannah they combined their show with that

by surveyors, who cleared brush on either side of their line, but which quickly became overgrown again if there was little traffic. North said they "hacked their way" through the Cherokee Nation.

They arrived in Montgomery, Alabama, to find a hotel as the only building on the site, or so North remembered. He may have told Day that there was only one hotel, not one building, since Montgomery had a Court House, forty-nine buildings, and twenty-eight log cabins in 1819, according to an Alabama historian.<sup>8</sup> The troupe had to clear trees and brush in order to have a space in which to raise the tent.

From Montgomery the circus went to Selma, Alabama, and then retraced their steps back to Columbia, South Carolina.<sup>9</sup> It was now November 1827. By today's roads it is 438 miles from Selma to Columbia, a trip that could be made in a little over a month by a horse-drawn caravan, but since we don't know how much they were slowed by cutting brush, nor how many stops they made in Georgia and Alabama, it is impossible to know more than the beginning and end of the journey.



of John Miller and Asa Smith. This combination had then thirty performers (in the ads), and twenty-five horses. It was here that we find Master North advertised for the first time. Just five months into his apprenticeship he was deemed worthy of mention. Charles J. Rogers, Chris Hughes, Stickney, Minnich and Master James Raymond were listed along with the performers from Miller and Smith's troupe, being Asa Smith, Master Smith, Dan Ricardo, Master Burroughs, Dan Champlin, W. H. Creighton, and George Yeaman. It was a strong company for its time.

The Savannah engagement lasted five weeks. At the end of it, Miller and Smith traveled north, and the Washington Circus went into rural Georgia. They were entering a frontier area, and one in which no previous shows had advertised. Towns such as Atlanta, Marietta, Columbus, Valdosta and Albany didn't yet exist. Roads were few, mainly the paths set

In Columbia once again, Quick and Mead joined forces with Asa Smith and Ben Brown, the former having the Yeaman Circus, and the latter the Pavilion Circus. The title used in Columbia was Washington Circus. The attraction in Columbia was the six-week session of the State Legislature, with its concomitant crowd of lawyers, lobbyists, and hangers-on. When the Legislature adjourned so did the circuses.

The next stop was Savannah, Georgia, where the combined companies opened on Christmas Day. That night Levi North was allowed the first benefit of his career. This meant that he received the proceeds, less expenses, of the performance. In actuality, Isaac Quick, as North's master, presumably pocketed the money. North rode a principal act, appeared as ringmaster for others, and contributed a well-known turn called "Metamorphosis," in which the rider changed costumes while riding in a sack. North, Rogers and James



Raymond concluded the performance by presenting the Billy Button act.

Charleston was next, opening night being 20 March 1828. The Brown brothers had not participated in the ten-week Savannah season, but had gone to Charleston, where they closed as the Smith-Washington forces arrived. It is possible that the Washington Circus disbanded when the Charleston date ended on 1 April. No more notices of them have been found, yet the performers appear in no other rosters during the summer of 1828. They reappear in September in Philadelphia as members of the Fogg & Stickney company, newly formed by Jeremiah Fogg and Samuel Stickney. The new partners called their building on Fifth Street the Washington Circus and Theater, which may indicate they were the successors to Quick and Mead. After the tenting season of 1829, the circus returned to Philadelphia. It was here that Levi North's apprenticeship ended after just three years.

He was now his own man and could hire out for the thirty-dollar a month salary of a principal rider. He joined the ranks of the available horsemen, men such as Sam Tatnall, Sam Stickney, James W. Bancker, Andrew Levi, James Raymond, and the Turner brothers, to mention only the American-born riders.

His first engagement was a memorable trip to the Caribbean Islands with a circus managed by Rufus Welch and Ernan Handy. They visited Havana, Matanzas, St. Thomas, and Jamaica, followed by Cartagena in Columbia. Of North's participation we know only that he appeared in the scenic riding act, "Death of the Moor."<sup>10</sup>

North returned to America, arriving on 31 August 1830. Day reports that he engaged with J. Purdy Brown, and was sent to Cincinnati. Brown opened in Cincinnati on 24 September in the amphitheater on Sycamore Street that William Blanchard had opened in January 1829. Brown and Noah Ludlow had occupied the same building in July 1829. Brown's company was to be home to North until 1837, through both J. Purdy's ownership, and that of Oscar Brown, J. Purdy's brother. This was a long tenure for a performer with one company, and



Drawing of Levi J. North from the *New York Atlas*.

bespeaks Brown's care of his employees. North reflected this attitude when he was himself an employer in the 1850's.

Oddly, Brown did not advertise North's presence until February 1833, indicating his minor place with what was one of the larger shows of the day. He was described in the advertising as, "The first equestrian in the country," doing his splendid act of horsemanship. Yet he was not the foremost rider on the bills, that place being accorded to George Yeaman. North also appeared with Dan Mfinich in the still vaulting, turning consecutive somersaults on a springboard to the number of twenty, and contributed a scenic act, "The Roman Gladiator," a la Ducrow. For this he received a salary of fourteen dollars a week, twice what Welch and Handy had paid him.

Walter Howard was hired by Brown in March, 1833, as a bare back rider, "without saddle or bridle," as the usage had it, and was given the top spot on the program. North was still presenting his act of horsemanship, as was Yeaman. In April North was listed as the three-horse rider.

Purdy Brown's programs by 1833

and 1834 were heavy with hippodrama, and in fact he was about to abandon the circus in favor of the theater, when his death in June, 1834 ended his amazing career.

Proof of North's prowess was an offer he received from Raymond & Weeks in 1834 of a salary of twenty-five dollars a week, and a \$500 bonus, if he would break his engagement to Brown. This North refused to do, and Brown rewarded him for his loyalty by increasing his weekly stipend to twenty-five dollars.<sup>11</sup> At this point the twenty-year old North was a full-fledged member of the profession, capable of performing all the standard turns expected of a rider, as well as being versed in the leaps and tumbling parts of a program. An example of his versatility was the occasion in St. Louis, when cholera struck Brown's troupe, and North and Walter Howard did the entire program between them.

North was described as being of fair complexion, with light-colored hair, about five-feet four inches, and having very small feet. As with most riders, he was a small man, capable of the cat-quick reactions necessary for one of his profession. However, it must be remembered that he was not much below average in size for the adult men of his day. He weighed about 115 pounds.

Several commentators spoke of his grace in the ring, even comparing him to dancers of the day. This applied to his physical actions, of course. The horse was set at pace by the ringmaster, and North entered the ring and in a single bound stood upright on the animal's back. To do this at all required athletic ability, but to do it with the elan of seeming to fly captivated audiences. Next, he performed those feats expected of a principle rider, such as bursting through paper-covered hoops, leaping strips of canvas, supporting himself on his hands, on one foot, and leaping from horse to ground to horse again, seemingly in an effortless manner. And all this was done while the horse cantered an arms length from the front seats. This was exciting to watch then, and remains so today; the essence of principal riding.

J. Purdy Brown died from eating poisoned crab in Mobile in June, 1834, and his circus was taken over



by his brother, Oscar W. Brown.<sup>12</sup> North stayed on, as did Minnich, and Oscar Brown added H. P. Madigan and Henry Rockwell as principal riders, and Joe Blackburn as clown. Blackburn was to become a close friend of North's.

In Vicksburg, Mississippi, in November 1834, we find North fisted as a bare back rider for one of the few times in his career. In fact, so seldom was it mentioned that we wonder if it was true, and not an agent's error in writing the ads.

In the 1835 season, Oscar Brown added Sam Stickney to his roster, Madigan having departed. Charles Mateer came to the company as well. Brown continued brother Purdy's habit of spending the summers in the North, and descending the Mississippi for appearances in the South during the winter. This method was another of Purdy Brown's innovations in circus management.

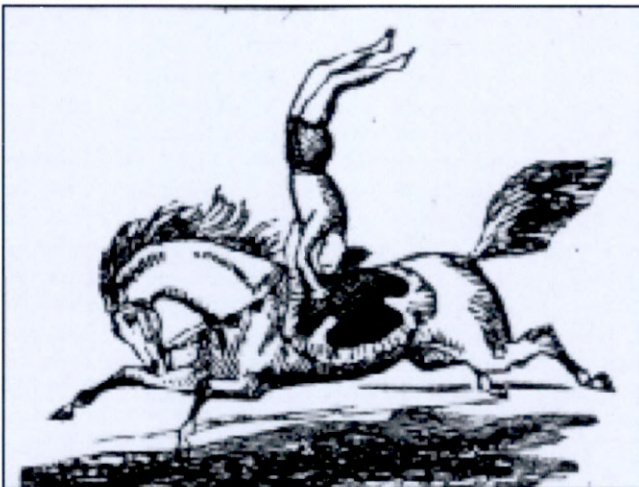
Lewis B. Lent became Oscar Brown's partner in 1835, and from his notes, preserved at the Somers Historical Society, we are able to gain a picture of Brown & Co.'s Circus, as it was known in 1836. There were twenty-six employees, of whom eleven were workmen. Of the performers, Sam Stickney was the equestrian manager and two-horse rider, his daughter Rosaline was the lone woman rider, North, Charles J. Rogers, Andrew Levi, Charles Mateer and Master Lipman were the male riders. This was a distinguished group, though at that time most of them had their greatest years ahead of them. The show paid a dollar a day to feed and house each person at the hotels. Three dollars a day fed and stabled all the horses.

The proprietors in 1838, when the roster was the same, were Oscar Brown, Lewis B. Lent and Jeremiah Fogg. Minnich, Blackburn, Moses Lipman and Barney Burns were present through these four years, as were the above-mentioned riders, including North. It was unusual in that era for such a group to remain so cohesive. The majority of performers seem to have moved about every two years, on average. The indication

is that the salaries were satisfactory, and the management somewhat enlightened.

Brown & Co. was dissolved in Cincinnati in April 1838, when Fogg and Stickney took it over. Previous to this time Levi North moved to the N. E. Waring Circus in New Orleans in January 1838. Here, he found his friend Joseph Blackburn once more, and the two decided to visit England together.

Waring's Circus that winter



(December to February) was half of the Waring & Raymond Menagerie and Circus of 1837, which split for separate showings over the cold months, only to reunite in the spring of 1838 for the touring season, and part again the next December. It was an unusual arrangement, the reason for which has escaped research. The leading performers for Waring were Barney Carroll, Dan Minnich,<sup>4</sup> Levi North and Joe Blackburn. When Waring moved to Mobile, Alabama in February, North and Blackburn began their trip together.

Blackburn's diary of their adventures has been published under the editorship of William L. Slout, and we follow his construction here.<sup>13</sup> They journeyed to Washington, D. C. via Charleston, and there agreed to appear with Charles Bacon's circus for four weeks. Bacon was in his first season as a proprietor, after twelve years in the business as a rider. The route encompassed Washington, Alexandria, and Bowling Green and Fredericksburg in Virginia, ending up in Richmond. In addition to his riding, North performed on the springboard, doing 14 only" twenty

somersaults in Washington, but reaching forty-one later on the tour. Blackburn twice mentioned that the horses supplied to North by the troupe were not up to par. North and Blackburn left the Bacon company in Richmond and went to Baltimore, and then Philadelphia. From there they went to New York, and sailed on 3 May 1838 for England.

North's adventures in England were unique in that he was the first American headliner to appear in London, making him an ambassador of western riding. Audiences in Europe were very serious observers of the ring, and for an American rider to astonish Europeans with his ability speaks very well of North. Given the generally inferior attitude toward things American held by Europeans, it may have simply boiled down to surprise that such a backward place would produce such genius.

The voyage to Liverpool took twenty-four days, and that to London, by stage-coach, another three. North arranged for a vaulting board to be made, after he had an interview with the great Andrew Ducrow, proprietor of Astley's amphitheater. In performing on such a board, the actor would turn somersaults consecutively, his ability being measured by the number of turns he made, landing on his feet on the board, which propelled him aloft again. Once the contraption fit North's requirements, he was able to turn twenty-five somersaults. Rehearsals at Astley's began on 30 June 1838. North, paired against the Englishman Thomas Price, did thirty-one somersaults, increasing to thirty-two on 2 July, the first performance. Price did fewer. Ducrow had the two vaulting boards set side by side, and with British and American flags set up to enhance the rivalry aspect of the performance. Blackburn clowned for North, acting as a sort of cheerleader. The contest went on for twelve nights, in only one of which Price was the winner. North reached his zenith at forty-four on 19 July. The audiences eagerly entered into the spirit of the event.

After a misunderstanding with



Ducrow, North and Blackburn signed on with Ryan's company, then in Leeds. North began performing on August 6, doing both riding and vaulting. Blackburn reports that he (North) received great applause, and his thirty-six somersaults were thought to be amazing. The two performers signed on for six months of traveling about the north of England with Ryan. This ended 30 March 1839, and the two friends signed on with Batty's circus, then appearing in Liverpool.

It was later, at Batty's in Henley, that North accomplished, for the first time by any rider, a somersault on horseback. Somersaulting had advanced by degrees as performers became adept at the practice. At first, it was enough to somersault from the horse's back to the ground, as Mr. Codet of Cayetano's troupe did in 1811. Next came the leap on horseback that ended in the rider landing astride the horse, this was first accomplished by W. B. (Barney) Carroll. North first went feet to feet at Batty's, on a pad, in a back somersault. We have no proof that he performed this at each exhibition thereafter. Oddly, Blackburn does not comment on the feat.

When T. Allston Brown wrote his *A Complete History of the Amphitheater and Circus*, which appeared serially in the *New York Clipper* in 1860 and 1861, he credited Timothy Turner with the first somersault on horseback, dating it 1 May 1826. Brown had read the notices incorrectly, as they reported Turner's leap being from horse to ground, not feet-to-foet on the animal. Levi North corrected Brown in a letter to the *Clipper*, printed 26 January 1861: It (Brown's history) also speaks of T. V. Turner turning a backward somersault on the horse, in 1828 (actually, 1826). It was never accomplished until I performed the feat in England, in 1839. I was also the first to perform the feat in this country, in 1840, at the Bowery Theater.

In point of fact, North was at the Bowery Amphitheater (not the Bowery Theater) in the winter of 1840-1841. Turner, at the Bowery Theater, was advertised as perform-

ing the turn in 1841.<sup>14</sup> Both men appeared on pad horses. A somersault on a bareback horse was not seen until 1846, when John Glenroy introduced it.

On 22 April 1839, Blackburn sailed for America, thus ending this most important account of Levi North's career. The clown mentioned in one of his last entries that he met Avery Smith and his employee Isaac Van Amburgh, who arrived in April to begin that famous seven-year European visit of Van Amburgh & Co. North stayed in England, much honored, until the fall of 1840. Among his rewards was a medal struck on the occasion of his turning fifty-five somersaults, an unheard of number, on 21 March 1839 in Birmingham. This medal, incidentally, still exists in the rider's family. A silver snuff-box, also a survivor, was presented to him in July of that same year for again reaching fifty-five leaps in London.

Upon his return to America, North



accepted a sixteen-week engagement with Welch, Bartlett & Co., beginning in November 1840, at the Bowery Theater in New York. He was now the leading circus performer on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1900, John Dingess, who had seen all the great riders, wrote of North: "He was certainly the most classical and finished equestrian that America or any other country has ever produced. . . all the riders then in this country tried to copy his elegant ease and fashion on horseback. There was not at that time any other individual who could ride as well as he did."

The Welch, Bartlett circus of 1840 was one of three troupes in which Ruftis Welch had an interest. The circus operated under five different titles in 1840, New York Circus being the one with which North appeared.

At the Bowery, he again demonstrated his somersault on the back of a horse, but it does not appear that he did this as a regular part of his act.

The Panic of 1837 was still having its effect on the entertainment business. The number of shows on the road in 1840 was down to thirteen (plus five menageries), and fell even lower in 1841. Welch hired North for a short season in the West Indies, receiving the munificent salary of \$350 a week for the three week run. He returned to Baltimore in June 1841 to ride for Bartlett & Delavan, a company that Welch & Mann bought out in July, with which the new owners made a tour of Pennsylvania and New York. North left the company in Reading, Pennsylvania because of illness, complaining of a sore chest. Prior to that the firm as "the first rider in the world" had advertised him. His contributions to the program were his principal act, a scenic act, and a ballet on horseback with Mrs. Asten. Timothy Turner replaced

him as principal rider. At this juncture one anonymous critic wrote of him: ". . . It is not a number of extraordinary feats on horseback that can make the most finished rider. North, like the dancers we mentioned, has "caught a grace beyond the reach of art." There is a mind in almost all he does. In stature, he is under the middle size, but well proportioned. His face is handsome and intellectual. He will be admired by everybody, but especially by the ladies He is what Dacron was in his prime--without exception the most graceful and accomplished rider of the day."

And another said of him: "Next to Ducrow (North) is the most graceful, the most classic equestrian we ever saw. Nor is this all -he performs the most daring and startling feats with an exquisiteness, so to speak, that at once captivates and astounds the beholder."

No other rider of his day received encomiums such as this, North was simply acknowledged as the best there was, comparable to the great Ducrow. In America, he did not perform on the springboard, as he had done in England. It may be that he didn't need to; his riding was enough to command attention.



John June, Lewis Titus and Richard Sands had the American Circus in Liverpool and London in 1842, in addition to the Van Amburgh Menagerie, in which June and Titus were partners. North signed on with the American company for one season.

At this time, Thomas Price and Levi North were two of the leading performers in England. Former rivals, they joined together in 1843 to put Price & North's Circus on tour. At season's end, North returned to America, and joined Rockwell & Stone's Circus (Henry Rockwell and Oscar R. Stone). This was on 18 December. This company had the distinction of being the first circus to play Niblo's Garden in New York. The location, according to Day, operated against its success, it being too far uptown.<sup>15</sup> North appeared with Rockwell & Stone until 9 February 1844, when he returned to England. Price and North were partners again in the season of 1844, at the end of which North sold out to Price.

Newspaper ad used in 1858 by North's Great National Circus. Pfening Archives.

Sands & Co. was still touring England in that year, and would in 1845 as well. Sands and his partner, Lewis B. Lent, had successfully planted the canvas tent as a circus hall in England in 1842, and had reaped the benefits of summer touring apart from using theater buildings as most English companies did. Just as in America in the 1820's, the tent allowed managers to show in venues that otherwise would have been bypassed. North was hired that winter to appear with Sands & Co. in the Theater Royal at Liverpool. He was still listed on the roster in the

| spring of 1845.

His next move was to Paris, and the *Cirque Champs Elysees*. It was in Paris in June 1845 that North performed before Louis Phillipe, King of France, in the monarch's private riding school. After a five-month season in Paris, he returned to America once more, signing up with Welch's Philadelphia winter show, Welch, Mann & Delavan, for a two-month stay, November and December 1845.

Rockwell & Stone once again secured North's services for the traveling season of 1846, as did John Tryon for the Bowery Amphitheater that winter. The North's lived in Brooklyn at this time, and on 1 October 1846, their first child, Sophia Victoria, was born. North, and those star performers such as himself, were assured of work over the winter in New York or Philadelphia, while lesser lights had to wait until spring when the traveling circuses filled out their rosters. Rufus Welch, so often North's writer employer, regularly had a cold-weather presentation in

Philadelphia, as well as two traveling companies in the summer. From 1845 until 1853, Welch had the largest organization in the country.

Welch & Delavan's Great National Circus went into the west in 1847, and North was their leading rider. Welch advertised him as "the Great Equestrian Hero, who has far surpassed the most celebrated rivals of this or any other country." North, J. J. Nathans, and Master John Glenroy, were the leaders of Welch & Delavan's corps, a trio not to be matched elsewhere. North had trained a trick horse, that is, one that performed without a rider ("at liberty," as it were) named Tammany, and which North rode as a menage horse as well. He introduced the animal on this show.

[illegible]



One supposes that any successful man, regardless of his profession, desires to control his own destiny by becoming independent. Levi North, at age thirty-four, in 1848, again invested in a circus. Stickney's Grand National Circus, then in New Orleans, went out as a partnership of North, Sam Stickney, and J. W. Jones. The latter was the treasurer. Following Stickney's usual route of Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky, where he was well-known, a situation that prompted an observer to say that, "every show that travels there is suspected of being Stickney's."<sup>16</sup> A successful season was capped by a December to April engagement in New Orleans. Tammany came in for a fine press notice in Little Rock, when an editorialist wrote: "Mr. North's riding was excellent, but the performance of his horse, 'Tammany' was a matter of astonishment to all who saw him. It is really wonderful to see this horse dancing to all sorts of tunes, changing step to the tune, and keeping the most perfect time."<sup>17</sup>

Although the title of the 1848 and 1849 versions of the company were usually some form of Stickney's Circus, most commentators called it North, Stickney & Jones, and indeed these names were part of the advertising in 1849. North was equestrian director, and Jones the manager. North did not participate in the winter exercises in New Orleans from December 1848, to March 1849, and we suspect he did not work in that off-season. He was back in April. The circus-traveled east through Alabama and Georgia, and as far as Charleston. In September the route doubled back on itself, finishing with a month's run in Mobile. They closed on Christmas Eve, 1850, and the company was disbanded.

Spencer Q. Stokes brought his circus into New Orleans in December 1850. Levi North, Puss Horner, the clown, and George Sweet, the rider, crossed from Mobile to join Stokes' "Mammoth Circus," and spent the following season

with him. They began in February in Baton Rouge, and went upriver to Missouri and Iowa, returning to New Orleans in December.

Dan Rice opened in New Orleans on 18 December 1850, and North found employment with the famous clown. He was granted a benefit on 16 January, at which time he was advertised as "Chief of Equestrians." He took some time off, and returned in March. Tammany was still a wonder among trained horses, and every show that North appeared with advertised the equine prodigy's presence.

A second child was born to Sophia North in September 1851, and we would speculate that the lying-in period was the reason for Levi's next move. He left Rice in July or August, and arranged to lease from Avery Smith the premises at 37 Bowery in New York. Here he promoted his first sole proprietorship, under the title "New York Amphitheater." It opened on 25 August, and featured several of Rice's employees, none of them top of the line. North was able to keep the, building only until 17 November, as

Portrait of Levi J. North printed in the 6 March 1880 *New York Clipper*.



Smith's partners, Sands & Lent, were moved in for the winter show. North's child, and first son, was named Henry.

Little Victoria North, aged seven, made her debut in the ring in 1852 as, "the smallest and youngest equestrienne in the world," as Welch's National Circus advertised her. She most likely rode a pony. The same publicity machine as, "the greatest living rider of the day" touted her father. In addition to his scenic and dramatic riding, North presented Tammany, and introduced his first apprentice, one Master Willie North, a hurdle rider, who was to remain with the master for the full seven-year apprenticeship. This boy's real name was William H. Naylor, and he reverted to that name when his apprenticeship ended. However, he remained with North on various circuses for another ten years, through 1860.

Another person in North's life was one Harry J. Turner. Seemingly a man with financial means, but no prior mention in the business, he backed North for three years, and they were close personal friends. They began their partnership in 1853 with "L. J. North's Hippodrome, Circus and Menagerie." The hippodrome movement in America began in this season with Franconi's Hippodrome in New York. Several circuses added the word hippodrome to their titles, but, as with North, lacked the quality of having a racing track and infield of a true hippodrome. Only two shows, Franconi and Welch, were the real item. Charles Day wrote that North's was a canal-boat show, traveling on water and raising the tent on shore, and the route seems to allow for this, but we have no other proof.

Eighteen-fifty-three was the year in which Rufus Welch's empire came apart.<sup>18</sup> As a consequence, his National Amphitheater in Philadelphia became available for that year's seasoned show, and Turner and North leased the premises from November through April



1854. Here, they presented the Siegrist brothers, Charles and Augustus, in their newly-introduced act called La Perche, which was to become standard throughout the circus world henceforth. It was also in Philadelphia in March 1854 that North's second son, Levi Ferdinand, was born.

In their 1854 tour, North and Turner were a wagon show, announcing that they had all new Concord-built wagons. These might have come from Stevens Abbott in that town. In both 1853 and 1854 North presented one of the early trained bear acts, that of Sig. Capulino. Victoria and Willie North were both on the roster, as were adult riders such as Burnell Runneffs and Edgar Jones. Ben Jennings was the clown, and Charles C. Pell the agent. Two months of the summer of 1854 were spent in Canada. In December they took possession of the Front Street Theater in Baltimore.

The largest troupe that North and Turner managed was their 1855 effort. There were twenty performers, which they organized in Baltimore. The riders, other than North, were Horace Smith, Louise Marion, and William Kennedy. James McFarland had introduced the ascension act on North's circus in 1853 and still presented it in 1855. Ben Jennings and his son Willie were the clowns. Harry Turner's management abilities shone with this troupe, providing a good-sized profit that the partners invested in the furnishings of an amphitheater in Chicago.

Theirs was not the first circus building in Chicago, as the little-known L. G. Butler had erected a temporary house with stoves and gas lighting in November 1854, at Lake and Wabash, but North's effort dwarfed Butler's. Located on the south side of Monroe Street, between Clark and LaSalle, it was two stories high, constructed of wood, ninety by 206 feet, with rooms for the performers, and stables for the horses. One-hundred-twenty gas jets supplied the lighting. Opening night was 19 November 1855. The amphitheater proved to be a popular venue, and solidified North's continual success. He leased rather than

owned the building.

From 1855 through 1858 Chicago was his base of operation. From there he toured the western states, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri. There were usually a half-dozen competing shows in those venues in each season, most of them about the size of North's, but occasionally a large show wandered through the territory. Sands, Nathans & Co., Van Amburgh & Co., and Spalding & Rogers exemplified these eastern aggregations.

North's 1856 touring company, though not particularly distinguished, beyond North's presence, nevertheless was a profitable venture. Tom Neville performed as somersault rider, doing both forward and backward throws; young Tony Pastor was the clown; North's children, Victoria, and six-year old Henry were there, as was the apprentice Willie North. A Miss Castella and James McFarland (husband and wife) were

Levi J. North and son, Levi F. c-1870. From the 1906 Barnum & Bailey route book. Pfening Archives.



the ascensionists.

Victoria North later described her father in this period as a very wealthy man. He had a home in Chicago, as well as a farm in Des Plaines, Illinois. He had a host of friends, and was active in politics.

Henry J. Turner died unexpectedly in the winter of 1856, and his managerial hand was sorely missed, as subsequent events seemed to prove. But there were still bright spots in 1856, among them, a \$20,000. net in St. Louis in a ten-day stand in September. Returning to his Chicago amphitheater in November, North disclosed that the building had been redesigned to include theatrical appurtenances. The season, from November to late April, was not successful, and North offered the building on a sub-lease, according to the 23 May 1857, *New York Clipper*. Prior to that, in March 1857, it was disclosed that Harry Turner had left his entire \$50,000. estate to North, a bequest that withstood a contest by Turner's brothers and sisters.

Armed with this bounty, North took to the road again in 1857, and in addition, in the fall elections of 1857, stood for the office of Alderman in Chicago. He won office by twenty-four votes, and served for one term, in those days, elected officials only met sporadically, usually in the first three months of the year. A city of 80,000 could conduct its business in a matter of a few weeks.

When no buyer emerged for the amphitheater, North occupied it again from November 1857 to April 1858. His route for the summer season led him into Missouri and Kansas, just as it did for the much larger Spalding & Rogers' circus, and the two sparred occasionally, as well as with "Border ruffians," and "ruffianly abolitionists (sic)," as the *New York Clipper* described them. Kansas, the "Bleeding Kansas," of historical note, in the time after the adoption of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, had its own civil war prior to the secessions of 1861. The two circuses survived intermittent interference, but it was also a year in which the Missouri River and its tributaries went into high flood,



and it was this that ended the opposition.

North returned east, to Quincy, Illinois, where he reformed his company, preparatory to returning to Missouri, once the water abated. He cut down the size of the circus, to where the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* called it "inferior, with performances on the cheap and nasty plan." It could have been at this point that his printer took over the show, which we allude to below.

North had a brush with great national events in Quincy, just as he had touched them in Kansas, both involuntarily. When the Lincoln-Douglas debates moved to Quincy in October 1858, the organizers of the event borrowed seats that North had stored in the town. As so often happened at circus performances in those days, the seats collapsed just as the debate was beginning. No one was seriously injured.

North's fourth, and last, winter season at the amphitheater in Chicago began on 22 November 1858, and ran until April. However, the circus performances ended on 22 January, and theatrical events took over the house. North lost the his lease to foreclosure at some point in the run. The circus was in the hands of the printer, according to the 18 June 1859 *New York Clipper*, and probably had been since the reorganization in Quincy of the previous summer. The building went back to the investor who had built it.

It is in the 1850's that we see the involvement of printers in the management of circuses for the first time. Such situations were brought about through foreclosure of one sort or another based on unpaid printing bills. As the popularity of printed posters among showmen increased, and their cost decreased, and the efficacy of that method of advertising showed value, the cost of a season's printing went from hundreds to thousands of dollars. When such figures were reached the printers began to pay attention to their accounts receivable, and were quick to foreclose on the property of companies that fell into arrears.

John E. Bacon, proprietor of the Farwell printing company in New York, was one of those who became circus owners in spite of themselves.

**NEW-YORK CIRCUS.**  
HIPPOTHEATRON BUILDING, Fourteenth-st  
opposite the Academy of Music.  
L. B. LENT, Manager.  
(THIS ESTABLISHMENT DOES NOT ADVERTISE IN THE  
NEW-YORK HERALD.)

EVERY NIGHT AT 8.  
WEDNESDAY, Feb. 14, at 2½ o'clock,  
SATURDAY, Feb. 17, at 2½ o'clock.  
SOCIAL FAMILY MATINEES,  
when the  
CHAMPION RIDER OF THE WORLD,  
ROBINSON,



will ride the  
TERRIFIC HURDLE ACT.  
CONTINUOUS SUCCESS  
of the  
FASCINATING SPECTACLE,  
THE SPRITE  
OF THE SILVER SHOWER,  
in which the embodiment of  
GRACE, STYLE AND ACTION,  
LEVI J. NORTH,  
will appear with his  
CORPS OF FAIRIES,  
and present the most interesting series of  
EQUESTRIAN TERPSICHOEAN PICTURES  
ever given in any arena.

This 1866 New York Circus ad listed Levi J. North. Pfening Archives.

He became a partner of Dan Rice's Great Show in 1858, and of Levi North's circus in 1859. North's manager, H. L. Stebbins, was also a party to this foreclosure, probably for reasons of unpaid salary, though he may have owed his position to an investment in the show. Stebbins had been North's agent in 1856.

There was a sale in Burlington, Iowa, in April, 1859,<sup>20</sup> that may have marked the transfer of ownership, which, if true, negates our statement about 1958. In any case, Bacon, Stebbins & Co. were listed as the proprietors in June. The show moved on until it was again attached in Columbus, Georgia, in December. This new action was brought by someone unknown to us, but could have been Farwell and Stebbins, protecting themselves against further loss. The Panic of 1857 was the cause of much misery in the circus business over the subsequent seasons, and no doubt contributed to the demise of North's company. Money was scarce, prices were high, and at least five circuses were auctioned at season's end.

Levi J. North's National Circus was auctioned at Columbus, Georgia on 18 January 1860. The calliope brought \$1,429, the horses and

"gear," another \$9,000. <sup>21</sup> The buyer proved to be Gilbert L. Eaton, a well-known circus agent, and scion of a wealthy Troy, New York car manufacturer. Eaton's career as an agent extended back to the 1847 Stone & McCollum circus. North and Eaton were partners. Miss Castella was still making an ascension daily; Andrew Levi, Herr Cline and Luke Rivers were among the performers. They opened in Troy on 21 May, visited Quebec and Ontario, and closed in Brooklyn in October. The season must not have been a successful one, as they did not repeat the partnership in 1861.

In January, 1861, the *Clipper* noted that Levi North was building wagons in Utica, New York. This was the hometown of Alexander Robinson, younger brother of the great John Robinson, and as time passed, Alexander announced the formation of his first circus, "Cooke's Royal Amphitheater." He may have chosen this name because he planned a season in Canada. Later, he added "Alexander Robinson's Great Show" to the title, and later still called it "Alexander Robinson & Co." In any event, Levi North was listed as the director, and the *Clipper* listed it as North's company on occasion. Most of the personnel were from the 1860 North roster.

Alexander Robinson had been assistant manager and doorkeeper on his brother's circus, which was the source of his knowledge of the business. One might guess that North oversaw the performance, and Robinson tended to the business end. They were together but the one season.

We find no employment for Levi North in 1862, nor any explanation for his absence from the ring. His son, Henry, was with George DeHaven that year. It is from the 1861 season that we find North so often listed as manager or director for various companies. This would seem to indicate that, though still riding, he was not the luminary he had been. This cannot be unusual, after thirty-five years of being one of the leading principal riders in America.

That North still had some money is proven by his investment in 1863 in the Antonio Brothers Circus, which



was offered for sale in late 1862. The new owners were William Lake and Horace Norton and North. Lake had just ended his partnership with John Robinson, Norton was a two, four and six-horse rider, and North acted as rider and manager. The show opened in Springfield, Illinois, where it had wintered, and spent most of the season in Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana. The title was "Lake & Co.'s Great Western Circus." North sold out in Cairo, Illinois, on 8 December.

Dan Castello and George W. DeHaven framed "Dan Castello's Great Show" in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1864. North's friend, Gilbert Eaton, was the agent, and North was the manager. This was a steamboat show ("Jeannette Roberts") plying the Mississippi and the Ohio and the Wabash. They stayed close behind the Union Army as it moved down the Mississippi, and played in the camps in Arkansas, and in Vicksburg. Both of North's sons, Henry and Levi, were with the troupe. Don Hensley located an announcement in the Kenosha, Wisconsin paper that reported that the government had confiscated the steamboat, but we know no more of that incident.

In Memphis in October Castello advertised that the company was reorganized, and materially strengthened. The partners appear to have parted ways, perhaps in Natchez. Levi North then accompanied DeHaven to Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, where DeHaven and Andrew Haight framed the "Great United Circus." for the 1865 season. North was listed as director, and appeared in the ring. Levi, Jr., eleven years old, did an act featuring wild ponies. On 5 July, North left the show in Council Bluffs, Iowa. His reason for doing so remains unknown.

We find him with Levi, Jr. in St. Louis in April 1866. George H. Metcalfe and a partner had constructed what they called a Hippodrome (and which became the Olympic Theater), opposite the Southern Hotel, which they opened on 23 April with what they said was North's Circus. However, none of the performers had any previous ties to North. When the show left for the summer tour in June it was as the

"New York Champs Elysees Circus," the third season for that title. North was the equestrian director. It would seem that he was trading on his name in these positions with western shows; certainly, his fame was such that his presence was heavily advertised. ("The Veteran Pioneer of Circus Amusements.")

At the age of fifty-two in the winter of 1866-1867, North fulfilled an eight-week engagement with L. B. Lent's New York Circus at the Hippodrome, Lent's building on 14th Street in New York. He was "a marvelous success," according to Charles H. Day, "astonishing his many admirers by the evident reten-



tion of his powers of his younger days." It would seem that from this point "America's Horseman" rode no more.

Perry Powers, a livery stable operator in Cairo, Illinois, framed a new circus for 1867. The title, "Powers Combination Circus," had some first-class acts, despite its small size. Tom Burgess, Willis Cobb, Oliver Bell, Don Santiago Gibbonois (John Fitzgibbons), Fred O'Brien, and Ed Schofield were on the roster. It also appears to be Frank Lemen's first circus job. North was again the manager. The circus traveled on a steamboat.

He suffered a tragedy on 18 April when Levi, Jr., a member of the company, died of consumption in Columbus, Indiana. He was not quite fourteen years old. With this, none of North's children were then in the business.

George F. Bailey, in 1868, hired North to present trained horses and ponies. And in 1869, William H. Sheppard and Charles H. Haskins

equipped and organized "Levi J. North's Circus," at Joliet, Illinois. For this troupe, North presented a liberty act composed of "wild ponies." These were presumably the same ones that Levi, Jr. presented on the Powers' show. North had trained them for his son. Sheppard offered the circus for sale in October, and James T. Johnson bought it.

Still on tour in 1871, North had an educated horse, one Mars, which had replaced the famous *Tammany*, and which he carried to Agnes Lake's *Hippo-Olympia*. He also acted as equestrian director for the circus. In these reduced positions, which he accepted because of his need for income, no onus attached to him in the press. His was still considered one of the great names of the circus world.

In 1872 he joined the "Grand Forest City Circus," operated by the Newton brothers, out of Hantsburg, Ohio. This was a twenty-nine wagon show that closed in Pennsylvania on 24 August, citing bad business. The Newton brothers were not alone in what was considered a season without prosperity (except for the Barnum colossus). Twenty percent of the forty-five circuses on tour closed early. North was listed as a rider in the *New York Clipper*, but this is most likely an error.

Chronicling North's professional journey is the easiest part of honoring him, for he stood head and shoulders above his contemporaries. He was the first of our great principal riders, and none of those who later rose to duplicate his feats seem to have had the skills he showed in any more measure. But his personality is almost completely obscured in the tale of his efforts in the ring. His success indicates hard work, and the singleness of purpose we would suppose such a career required. As a manager, of his own circuses, and those of others, he must have had that gift for organization that such tasks required. His long-time employees, such as Charles C. Pell, James McFarland, Tom Osborne, Miss Castella, and William Naylor, worked for him season after season,



indicating their satisfaction with his management. We know of no censure of him by either employees or rivals.

We would mark his career as a showman a success. His problems arose from the financial Panic of 1857, and the Missouri River floods of 1858. The collapse of his 1859 tour occurred in a year in which there was no money in the South, which was where he toured. He was not alone in suffering for these reasons.

His declining years were spent in retirement in Brooklyn, in such genteel poverty that his daughter Victoria and son Henry had to support him. Charles Day wrote that North was morbidly sensitive about his reverses, and resisted most efforts to interview him.

He retired to his Brooklyn home, where in 1884 he was reported to be ailing with bronchitis and liver trouble. Frank Pastor, the clown, died in June 1885, and North attended the funeral of his old acquaintance. He caught a cold at the ceremony, which led to a lung hemorrhage. He died on 6 July 1885, at the age of seventy-one. He is buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn.

Perhaps the most lyrical of the homage's paid to North was that of Mons. LeThorne (John M. Dilks), the acrobat and strongman, who was quoted in the 18 July 1885 *Clipper* as saying: "The style of this remarkable man was of his own creation. Many attempted to imitate it, but none succeeded completely. We shall never look upon his like again."

#### Notes:

1. Gail Burwell genealogical investigation, 1995. Author's collection.
2. Charles H. Day, "The Eventful Career of Levi I North," *The New York Clipper*, 6 March 1880.
3. John Dingess manuscript, Hertzberg Collection, San Antonio, TX, Public Library.
4. *New York Clipper*, 11 July 1883.
5. Columbia, S. C. *Telescope*, 8 and 15 December 1826.
6. Charles H. Day, op. cit.
7. *New York Clipper*, 18 January 1864.
8. Milo B. Howard, State of Alabama, Department of Archives and History, letter to author, 16 January 1979.
9. Stuart Thayer, Trouping in Alabama in 1827, *Bandwagon*,

March-April, 1982.

10. Charles H. Day, op. cit.
11. *ibid.*
12. Noah M. Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It*, (reissue, New York, 1966.)
13. William L. Stout, ed, *A Clown's Log*, (San Bernardino, 1993).
14. *Republican Herald* (Providence, RI), 2 July 1841.
15. Charles H. Day, op. cit.
16. anon., *New Orleans Programme*, reprinted *New York Clipper*, 18 December 1858.
17. Little Rock, AR, *Arkansas State Gazette*, 29 June 1848.
18. Stuart Thayer, "Rufus Welch's Worst Season," *Bandwagon*, November-December, 1990.
19. Walter C. Scholl, "Early Chicago Circus History," cited by George Chindahl, *White Tops*, November-December, 1954.
20. Hannibal, MO, *Hannibal Daily Messenger*, 13 April 1859, and *The New York Clipper*, 30 April 1859.
21. *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 29 January 1860 and *The New York Clipper*, 24 January 1860. The callopie may have been left in Chicago as the *Cincinnati Enquirer* says it was auctioned in that city.

## ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN CIRCUS, 1793-1860

Long out of print, this three volume history has been re-issued in a single 650 page book that sells, postpaid, for \$55.00 This is a 8 1/2" x 11" paperback, fully illustrated, and brought up to date (Volume I was re-printed in 1993, but Volume II hasn't been seen since 1986). This is a very limited edition, and I'm a very old man, so this is probably the last time around. "Come a runnin, but don't fall down, we'll hold the baby white you eat."

Available from the author.  
Stuart Thayer  
430 17th Avenue East  
Seattle, WA 98112







# Gunther Gebel-Williams, A Memory

By William H. Woodcock

I first met Gunther Gebel-Williams at the old Milwaukee Arena in early July 1970. It was his second season with the Ringling show and needless to say he was taking the nation by storm. We were working for Sid Kellner at the time, showing in Michigan. On an off day, I loaded up wife Barbara, teenager Ben and eight month old Shannon and headed for Muskegon where we boarded the ferry in our car.

The Ringling show had been brought into Milwaukee by Circus World Museum in connection with its annual parade. Later Ringling played Milwaukee a second time on its regular fall route.

As we neared the city, we were surprised to see that the ferry depot was right along side the parade marshaling area. Although the parade had been held the previous day, the museum continued to display the wagons and hitches to the public.

Visiting the Ringling show is

Gunther with two elephants and a tiger in 1970. Photo courtesy of © Feld Entertainment, Inc.

always exciting, especially for high grass show people such as us. In 1970 it was even more so. Despite having only half as many railroad cars as today, there seemed to be twice as many people in the performance, lots of clowns, show girls, acts, troupes and animals. I also remember Jimmy Ille had a big band playing circus music.

As I recall, the popular wisdom of the day regarding the Ringling show expanding to two units was met with gloom and doom. Even John Ringling North was quoted as saying, "I couldn't make money with one show. How the hell can they do anything with two?"

I personally felt building a show around one person was a bad mistake. It would reduce the show to the stature of a one-ring European circus, ill suited for large American arenas. But as we all soon learned, the



Gunther and Bill Woodcock in 1994. Fred Pfening photo.

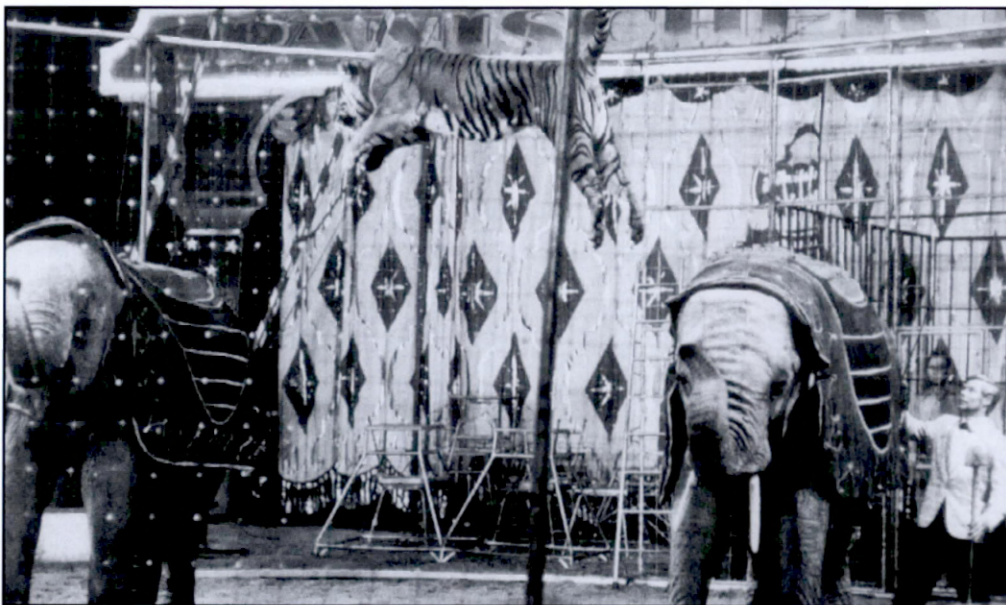
Feld-Williams association was a marriage made in heaven.

My friend John Herriott was in the performance that season, plus being Bob Dover's assistant. It was quite a time for him and his wife Mary Ruth after being at Circus World Museum for so many years.

Contrary to what I had expected, Gunther had no problem with a large arena. He was all over the place. The elephant number, for example, was spread over the hippodrome track and all three rings and he gave all the commands.

He had the first athletic tiger act I ever saw with one cat leaping to a teeterboard, vaulting a second tiger upward to a pedestal. He also had three rings of liberty horses presented by the Williams family.

Finally came the greatest circus animal act I





ever saw. It had an Asian elephant, an African elephant and a large Bengal tiger. The elephants wore protective padding, enabling the tiger to leap from back to back. The act concluded with the African elephant turning slowly on a tub while Gunther stood on his back astride the tiger.

At intermission, I remarked to Herriott, "Johnny, this stuff is pretty strong." To which he replied, "I have to follow him with my little ponies."

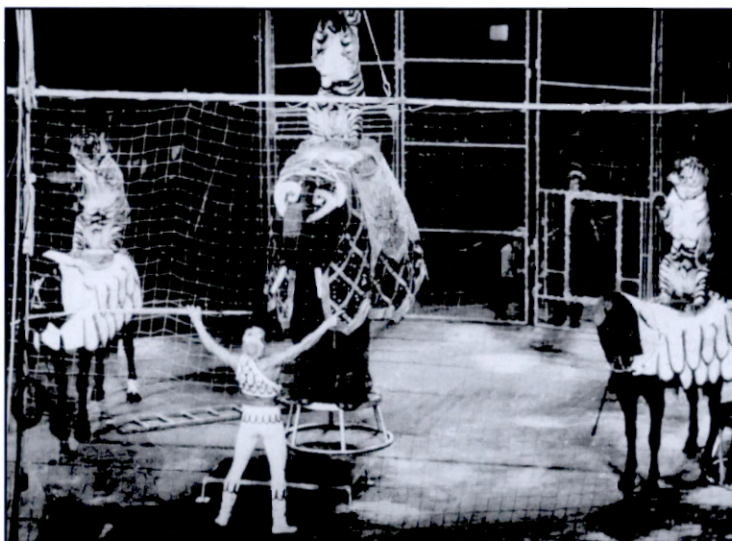
Between shows John introduced us to the man himself. His English then was nearly non-existent, and I'm sure he didn't have a clue who we were other than that we shared the same profession. But he went out of his way to show us the operation from top to bottom, especially the elephant herd which included the three young elephants Herriott had trained at Baraboo. They seemed to perfectly understand German already.

I happened to notice a rather large crowd of people being escorted about between shows. Irvin Feld was pointed out to us as was his brother Israel and Irvin's son Kenneth who I was told was attending college back east. It was the only time I ever saw Israel Feld.

The most bizarre occurrence of the day was that several people told Barbara and me that Gunther's wife was expecting a child, but not to breathe a word to anyone. We, of course, were delighted to be included in this conspiracy. Secret keeping on the Ringling shows remains one of the principal recreations to this day.

So our adventure in Milwaukee ended. We headed back to Michigan and into the practice ring the next morning.

Several years later I was in charge of twenty elephants at the Ringling park in Davenport, Florida. One morning I received a call from Irvin Feld explaining that quite a few people from the Red Show would be visiting the park, including Gunther and his family. Mr. Feld asked that I



Gunther with two horses, an elephant and three tigers in the 103rd edition of Ringling-Barnum. Photo courtesy of © Feld Entertainment, Inc.

work all the elephants expressly for them, but particularly for Carolla Williams, who had adopted Gunther as a child. This was pretty heady stuff.

The day arrived and all Red Show guests were seated in the bleachers. Basically we had three pyramid-type elephants acts, two groups of five and one of seven young elephants as well as our Anna May. If seen back to back these acts could seem repetitious, if not boring. By the time we had finished, Gunther was the only one left.

He was very complementary about our work in general, and Anna May, Barbara and Ben in particular. I must admit, however, that as I received my accolades that day, a number of park patrons approached Gunther for his autograph, while not a single one of them asked me for mine.

In 1977 the decision was made to send these elephants on tour with the Blue Show the following season. I had never seen the new Madison Square Garden, so I was flown up to New York while the Red Show was appearing there. The house was packed that night, and imagine my surprise to see that some of the people had hung cloth banners over the railings with slogans like "We love you Gunther" written on them.

Irvin Feld had done it. He had made Gunther a household name.

But how? He wasn't in the movies as Clyde Beatty had been. Was it his rapport with animals? Was it his charisma? The Don Foote ward-robe? The press ballyhoo? With the hindsight of thirty years, the answer is probably that the times were right for a Gunther Gebel-Williams and Gunther Gebel-Williams was right for the times.

One thing I do know. Animal training on the Ringling show in those

days was difficult at best. Traditionally circuses toured in the summer which left the winter months to train new acts. Gunther faced a tour that was virtually non-stop for two years. Practice time was at a premium and had to be vied for. It was particularly hard for flying acts and cat acts which required early morning or late night sessions. And sometimes the building people could make things difficult.

But he pulled it off. Year after year he refined his existing acts and created new ones. He was always on the go.

Over the years I got to know Gunther about as well as anyone which really meant not at all. He was not prone to chitchat, least of all about the past. I once mentioned to him how much I had been impressed by his earlier act with the elephants and tiger. He promptly shrugged it off and turned to current events.

I always envied his dedication and work ethic. In fact, I thought his relationship to the Ringling show was almost Shakespearean. If the situation arose he would have gladly fallen on his sword for the glory of Rome. That's how he was.

Last year I visited Gunther in Atlanta in the company of Richard Reynolds and Don Covington. He was as gracious as he had been in Milwaukee so many years before. Little did I suspect that this would be the last time I would see him. It may be an overused expression, but I sincerely feel that we will never see his like again.



# CIRCUS SEASON 2002



Frederick Whitman Glasier, American, 1866-1950  
*Pete Mardo* Print from 8x10 negative number 1365

## Programs and Exhibitions

### Center Ring Performances;

Celebrate the living history of the American Circus through this series of intriguing presentations by notable circus personalities. Each performance is an opportunity to go behind the scenes and experience life "under the big top." Season 2002 will focus on the Circus in American Life. Join us on the fourth Saturday of each month, January through June. Center Ring Stage, Museum of the Circus.

*Center Ring Performances are sponsored by the Cordelia Lee Beattie Foundation*

**Circus Celebrity Night:** January 11, 6:30 PM, Museum of the Circus

**Annual Windjammers Concert:** January 26, Courtyard, Art Museum

**"The Greatest Show on Earth":** A community celebration, film festival and exhibition in honor of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Academy Award winning film. January 31 through 2002. Museum of the Circus

*In partnership with Circus Sarasota, Sarasota Film Society, Manatee Educational Television, Sarasota Herald-Tribune.*

**Friends and Family Day:** February 2, 12:30 PM-3:00 PM, The Circus in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art

Call (941) 359-7776 for reservations.

*The MetLife Foundation sponsors Friends and Family Days*

**On exhibit February 2nd through May 12th, "Images from the World Between: the Circus in 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Life" and "Jon Corbino: Circus Paintings in Sarasota Collections".** February 2 through May 12. West Galleries, Art Museum

*Images from the World Between is organized by the American Federation of Arts. Additional support is provided by Beatrice K. McDowell and locally by Bank of America*

The 2001-2002 season of exhibitions and programs is made possible with the support of the Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax, through the Board of County Commissioners, the Tourist Development Council, and the Sarasota County Arts Council, the State of Florida, Florida Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, the Florida Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, and our generous members, sponsors and contributors. For ticket price and information call, (941) 351-1660. All dates are subject to change.

FSU | RINGLING CENTER FOR THE CULTURAL ARTS  
The John and Mable  
**RinglingMuseumofArt**

5401 BAY SHORE ROAD \* SARASOTA, FL 34243 \* 941-359-5700

[www.ringling.org](http://www.ringling.org)



Season's Greetings.



CIRCUS SARASOTA  
LET YOUR SENSES SOAR

2009  
FEBRUARY 1 - MARCH 3

FOR TICKETS  
CALL 941-355-9805



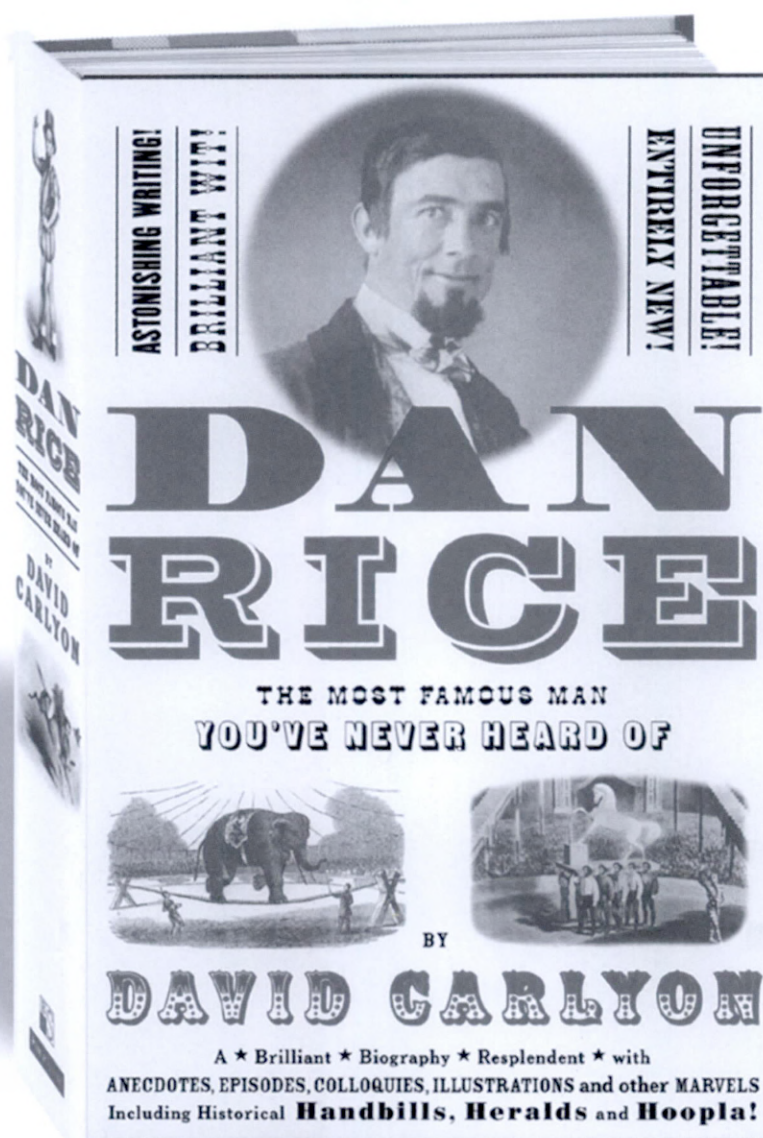


# Was Dan Rice...

*Abe Lincoln's friend? A Southern sympathizer?  
Uncle Sam? America's greatest clown?*

Look for the answers  
in David Carlyon's  
brilliant biography  
of this larger-than-  
life character.

"Wonderfully  
appealing and  
constantly  
fascinating...  
Carlyon has  
produced a  
masterful work  
of cultural and  
theater criticism  
that advances  
the literature  
as well as it  
entertains."  
—*Publishers Weekly*  
starred review,  
November 19, 2001



[www.publicaffairsbooks.com](http://www.publicaffairsbooks.com)

**PUBLICAFFAIRS**

**IN BOOKSTORES NOW**



# Frank A. Robbins a most successful failure

PART TEN  
By Robert Sabia

**1907-again, it couldn't happen again**

A rather startling ad was presented to the readers of the *Billboard* issue of March 9th, 1907, wherein Edward Arlington announced to the world that he had been a silent and secret partner (stockholder) in the Frank A. Robbins Circus, and he desired to sell his interest. The ad stated that "Owing to my having acquired other interests, which will conflict with the above, it becomes necessary to immediately dispose of my stock and interest in the best piece of circus property, of its size, with an established reputation in profitable Eastern territory. It is an exceptional opportunity for capable showman or business man, who can take an active part in business. This property, completely equipped, painted and ready for opening, can be seen at Jersey City Winter Quarters. For particulars as to terms and conditions, address EDWARD ARLINGTON, 8305 13th Ave., BROOKLYN, N.Y." What he said in the ad was true--the show was an excellent piece of circus property. What he didn't say was also true--the show hadn't made any real money in its two years of existence.

It may be recalled that Mr. Arlington's participation was never mentioned before in the trade papers. This may be because for the 1905 and 1906 seasons he was traffic manager for the Barnum & Bailey Circus which also had as its business manager, his father, George Arlington. Edward's financial interest in another circus might have been considered a conflict of interest by the Barnum & Bailey management. In the Spring of 1907 Edward Arlington was about to assume a general manager's and part ownership's role in the Pawnee Bill's Wild West and, in that

capacity, partly responsible for routing that large aggregation. Therefore, he apparently felt it was appropriate to divest himself of any possibility of cross influences. There is no indication that he was successful in selling his interest in the Frank A. Robbins Circus.

There was little news of the show in the trade publications during the winter and early spring other than a few brief comments about certain winter activities of individuals associated with the show. Preparing the circus for the road proceeded at the new winterquarters in Jersey City. As the show was to continue at the same size as in 1906, (believed to be 16 railroad cars), the focus would have been in repair and painting rather than building new wagons and tableaux. Mr. Robbins did offer to sell the ex Forepaugh Eagle and Deer floats for \$125 each. He may have been successful in selling the former but not the latter, as it was again offered for sale at \$90 a year later. There may have been one or more tableaux purchased at this time from surplus circus property from Barnum & Bailey and/or Forepaugh-Sells.

In the April 13th issue of the *Clipper*, a call ad was placed requesting all people who were engaged by the show to report to the show

Robbins advance car in 1905. From the collection of Richard Flint.

grounds at Passaic, New Jersey, on Tuesday, April 23. Two days later the show opened before packed houses. The article in the *Billboard* stated that several thousand were turned away but that is highly doubtful as the local newspaper didn't report a turnaway and a trade publication a number of weeks later stated that the show had yet to have a turnaway in 1907. Nevertheless, there was a very good house at both performances. The program was listed as follows: (1) Tournament; (2) Clown song by Miss May Koster; (3) Double Trapeze by the Orton and Lloyd Children; (4) Unsupported ladder, Carliso and Silverton, Flying rings by Miss Bessie Lloyd; (5) Double jockey act, John Rooney and Wm. Peewee; (6) Aerial bars by The Aerial Lloyds; (7) Clown number, Human Automobile, Thiel, Glenfield and Ritter; (8) High wire bicycle act by the Orton Troupe, bicycle act; (9) Menage act, Miss Belle Clark and Rthel Anderson; (10) Head balancing trapeze, B. Orten, Single Trapeze, Miss Bessie Lloyd, Comedy wire act, Myron Orton; (11) Loop walking, Harry Koster, Swing perch Iva Orton; (12) Principal act, Miss Josie Ashton and John Rooney; (13) Clown number, Bear Hunting, Girard Leon, George Whalen and Harry Gray; (14) Acrobats, The Three Herberts, and The Seven Venates, lady acrobats; (15) Two-horse carrying act, Norman and Iva Orton and Helen Roberts





and Maude Scott; (16) Bicycle act, The Marvelous Heuman Troupe; (17) Menage act, Miss Gray and Miss Baker; (18) Wire act, Caroso and Silterton, Dancing tight wire, R. Dooley; (19) Casting Act The Famous Lloyd Family; (20) Burlesque Mule, M. Orton and Harry Pierce; Hippodrome races. (21) Gentlemen's Flat Race; (22) Man against Horse; (23) Ladies Flat Race; (24) Pony Clown Race, Joe Marty, Al Moninee and Ed La Belle; (25) Roman Standing Race, Keenan, Powley and Hughes; (26) Chariot Race, Miss Allen, Mr. Williams and Miss Depew. B. Dooley was the equestrian director. Professor Gennaro Marraurini was back as the bandleader of 24 musicians.

It will be noted that many of the acts or at least the performers were repeats from the previous season. The most significant addition was the Orton Family who had considerable range in their collective talents. The greatest loss was the wonderful Herzog performing stallions, a headliner act of the first rank. For the third year in a row, there wasn't an elephant presentation even though there were two elephants on the show. They were young bulls and probably never trained.

The roster of the side show was also provided with Harry Hodge, manager (repeater); L. E. Debonaire, Punch and magic, Jack Hodges, lightning sketch artist; Frank Hurley, musical comedian (repeater); The Mysterious Hilda, lady handcuff expert; Millie Tricorico, sword walker; Margaret Still, snake hypnotist (repeater); Professor Brown, illusionist; W. H. Jacob's, colored band and minstrel show; Millie Zorene, Cassala Barotta, Ethel Demar and Natille Monda, oriental dances; Herr Bolton, strong man and expansionist; and Madam Troller, mind reader and fortune teller. This appears to be a strong lineup especially with the four couch dancers to draw the bonnie lads into the gambling arena. They didn't miss a trick, if you will excuse the pun.

Lastly, the executive staff was listed. Again, in addition to Messrs. Robbins and Beckman, Charles Sprague was back as secretary and steward; Frank Robbins Jr, assistant manager (repeater); Clarence Farrel,

assistant treasurer (repeater); Joe H. Hughes, press agent; Harry Hodge, manager side show (repeater); George Ross, legal adviser; Gus Fairbanks, 24 hour man; Mrs. Frank A. Robbins, manager candy stands (repeater for life), Charles Elmendorf, assistant steward; M. J. Haley, canvas boss; Jack Kent, boss hostler (repeater); F. Marshall, property boss; Ike Smith, boss chandelier (repeater); and R Fegan, side show canvas. Also known to be back as lot superintendent was number one son, Charles Robbins. Somehow he was overlooked in the listing.

In the October-November 1937 issue of *White Tops*, there was an interesting article on old time showman, Joe Hughes, and how he got the job as press agent on the Robbins Circus. In 1906 he apparently developed a friendship with Fred Beckman as a result of his position as the box office manager at a New York City museum. Mr. Beckman offered Joe Hughes a position in the white wagon, probably as the assistant treasurer. The position had already been offered to Clarence Farrel by Frank Robbins. Fred Beckman was a man with integrity and didn't wish to disappoint Joe Hughes, so he offered him the position of press agent. The article went on "... Joe gulped ... and accepted. He had never spent a day on a newspaper in his life. Came opening day in Passaic, New Jersey. Joe went downtown to plant some copy with the afternoon papers. Arrived at the first newspaper office, he went in the first door he came to and landed in the business office. Somebody looked out through a wicker and said: 'We run your ads here and take you



Carrie and John Rooney, featured riders on Robbins. Pfening Archives.

money.' 'But I want to give you a story, Mister,' said the young press agent. 'In that case, it is the city editor you want to see' was the advice from the wicker. Joe went upstairs and announced himself. 'Have you got some copy ready for us?' 'Well, no. I haven't.' 'That's O.K.' the city editor assure him. 'You leave me a few mats and give me some dope. I like to write circus stories myself.' The editor must have been a man of his word. That afternoon his story with art layouts greeted Passaic readers from the front page. 'I soon found that most editors like to write their own copy. Being a press agent was pleasant work.'

It wouldn't be Passaic if there wasn't a bit of drama connected to the engagement. At the night performance there was a crush of patrons waiting to gain admission to the big top. "The ticket office for the main show, in order that the early visitors might patronize the attractions in the smaller tents, did not open before about a half hour before the circus itself commenced. As a consequence,





when the sellers started to dispense with their tickets there was a bad crush surrounding the wagon. In the effort of the people, each one to be the first to get into the big tent, they jammed and pushed until those more frail were threatened with serious injury. Children cried and a number of women screamed, many more from fright than from real injury. The police stationed on the grounds got busy and by the hardest kind of work prevented several incipient panics. They were commended by all for their good work."

Rambunctious behavior was not confined only in the evening. Local horses shared in the panics as well. During the street parade in the morning, a team of four horses belonging to a Hoboken drayage firm took particular note of the elephant and camel as they rounded the bend in the line of march. Being used to being the big guy on the block, the four-horse team was frightened by these observed monsters. The horses bolted and the driver, who was almost thrown from his seat by the sudden jar, snatched up the reins and drove the horses on the sidewalk. The pole of the wagon struck a tree and knocked the two fore horses to the ground. The horse on the right of the front team was sent flying back under the hoofs of the horse behind him. The horses became entangled in broken harness but were released without any serious injuries thanks to the quick action of the passersby.

The Hargreaves circus provided opposition to Robbins in 1907. Pfening Archives.

The elephant and camel were nonplused by this incident, looked about, and then quietly proceeded on their way (thankgoodness)

In jumps of only ten miles or so, the show played Monclair, Orange and then Elizabeth (4/29). At this latter city, "treat" is too casual a word to describe what was in store for the local circusphile. Following Robbins was Washburn's Trained Animal Show (5/3-4), then Forepaugh-Sells (5/21) and finally Hagenbeck-Wallace (6/8). Amazingly, all four circuses did big business and had great reviews. And we must not forget that Barnum & Bailey had closed at the Garden just a week or so before Robbins arrived in this fair city. You can be sure that many locals caught The Greatest Show On Earth when it was just across the Hudson River. All-in-all, a great few weeks for the lovers of sawdust and spangles.

The intense competition at the next stand, New Brunswick, was the same with a slightly different cast of characters. In lieu of Washburn, substitute Thomas Hargreaves, a show that approximated Robbins in size. Hargreaves was there first, playing the city on April 26th. Unfortunately for Mr. Hargreaves, his show did not please at all. In fact the review's headline was "MR. HARGREAVES HANDED US A

LEMON." The article went on to relate that while Mr. Hargreaves was in New Brunswick, his performers weren't. It was called the littlest big circus that played that city in over 20 years. The performance was around 70 minutes that could have been compacted into far less than an hour. While it was assumed the show would cost 25 cents, the admission tickets were 50 cents with an additional 25 cents for reserve seating. Over 3,000 attended the so-called performance despite a heavy rain. The show did not depart for its next stand before 6 A. M., the next morning. Into this devil's nest strolled the Frank A. Robbins Circus and late as well. Because of a strange bit of railroad routing, it did not

arrive until 8 AM. It wasn't until one PM that the parade took place but it was a good one by all reports and included three bands. The show announced it was charging only 25 cents admission. Press agent Joe Hughes stated that the show carries patented seats that could not collapse. And why was this an important comment to make? Simply this, Hargreaves seating collapsed the day before in White Plains, New York, injuring hundreds of the two thousand that were thrown to the ground. In contrast to the evil show Hargreaves, a different headline awaited our heroes. "ROBBINS' CIRCUS DELIVERED THE GOODS" screamed the local press. The show played to standing room only at night. The paper noted there were many excellent acts that were not advertised. The family of bicyclists (the Heuman Troupe) alone were worth a trip to the circus grounds to see. The Aerial Lloyds who were advertised, were just wonderful and many of the other riding, wire walking, rope walking and globe walking brought "ahs" and "ohs" from an appreciative audience. Naturally Frank A. could not resist fleecing the public just a bit. Although advertised at 25 cents, at the ticket wagon in the afternoon, ducats were being sold at 50 cents. When a complaint was made to the local constable, the ticket agent was aghast to discover he was uninformed of this price



reduction. Encouraged by the oversight of the constable, the ticket seller reduced the price to the advertised 25 cents and was more than pleased to give back 25 cents to anyone who had paid the higher amount (and probably could provide a written affidavit to prove it). That's not all. Even at the 25 cent level, a ticket stand right at the entrance continued to charge a service fee of 10 cents for the convenience of avoiding the crowds at the white ticket wagon. Even with these minor distractions, the locals loved the performance. Forepaugh-Sells and Hagenbeck-Wallace followed in a couple of weeks, also to excellent business and reviews.

Another short jump took Robbins to Perth Amboy. There were railroad delays which caused the well received parade to commence at noon that in turn was followed by a free act on the circus grounds. The big top was thronged at both performances but the heavily advertised "Dip of Death" was not performed. This is not too surprising as the advertising was a carryover from the previous year and no such act was on the program for 1907. Some people want it all. Hundreds of people paid 60 cents for their tickets, buying them at the outer ticket stand. Again reserves were an additional 25 cents. Plainfield (5/2) was pleased by another flurry of competition as Washburn (5/7) followed Robbins which in turn was followed by the big Forepaugh-Sells aggregation. Side-by-side advertisements graced the local newspapers. Just OK business was garnered by Robbins. The circus was delayed in unloading by local health officials who were looking for signs of small pox. Fortunately none was found and the circus was given a clean bill of health. Forepaugh-Sells experienced similar treatment a couple of weeks later with similar results. Packed houses were the order of the day for the Columbus-based circus.

It was across the Hudson to White Plains, New York (5/6), where the collapsing stands on Hargraeves occurred a week before. Repeat stands predominated starting with White Plains and continuing for the next couple of weeks. Out of the next 12 dates, 9 were played 3 years in a

row and yet another 2 years. Although these were large towns and mid-size cities, overplaying any route will take its toll on business. Rain started in White Plains and continued the next day at Mount Vernon. At Mount Vernon, a very muddy lot caused the patrons to sink 4 inches into the slime. The show didn't arrive until noon although the run was about 15 miles. The parade was



The Leon Washburn show was another providing opposition to Robbins in 1907. Pfening Archives.

given a one o'clock to a large crowd in center town. Getting the afternoon performance to start at four o'clock was a minor miracle. The program was presented in only a single ring at night which was placed in the least muddy part of the arena. Both performances gave general satisfaction to those who braved the elements. The weather finally cleared in Yonkers (5/8) and that was reflected at the box office where good business was registered at both performances. Although no heartstopping acts were noted, most were very good and greatly enjoyed. The morning parade was viewed by many folks. It was lead by women equestrians who were followed by boys on ponies. Next were gaily painted closed wagons that presumably held wild animals. Three of these wagons had brass bands on them which were conducted by clowns. Two open cages, one containing a large black bear and

the other lions, followed. No mention of elephants or lead stock in the parade but it can be assumed that absent an incident involving them, these animals participated in the parade. The line of march was concluded by a playing steam calliope. It was noted that during the morning haul to the lot a wagon belonging to the show was hit by a trolley. The impact of the accident broke all of the trolley's windows but no injuries were incurred. The always good stopover at Stamford (5/10) did not disappoint. However the take probably was not up to expectations as the local police put a lid on gambling. Mr. Robbins was called to police headquarters and advised of the prohibition regarding gambling. Amazingly he acknowledged that there were gamblers and gambling apparatus with the show but upon ascertaining the attitude of the local gendarme, promised there would be no gambling that day. Because of rains during the evening performance and during the teardown, the lot was very soft and the pole wagon mired in the mud. It wasn't until 5 a. m. the next morning that the train left Stamford for its next date at South Norwalk. Fortunately, the run was only 12 miles, and everything went off as scheduled. Business was just fair at the Saturday date.

The next week opened to a fine "G" note at Ansonia (5/13): Good weather, Good crowds, Good parade, Good performance. During the unloading process, around \$200 worth of tickets were stolen so the show had other tickets printed on the reverse side to preclude the stolen tickets being used for admission. The parade for this date was a very long one because the show not only paraded in Ansonia but crossed over to the adjoining town of Derby. Many animals and several elephants were observed in the parade march. The locals particularly enjoyed the Heuman's bicycle act and Ms. Belle Clark riding a brown horse. A cake walk was accomplished with bells attached to each of the horse's legs which was roundly applauded by the large audience. The Heuman's were considered to be the best of their type ever to perform locally. Meriden was a bit more raucous as the pickpockets who followed the show had a field



day. Over \$200 was stolen from the locals and the police were unable to make any arrests. Bumping and lifting seemed to be the order of the day. Sweet revenge on the Nutmeggers because of the recent unreasonableness of the Stamford police. Another good day's business was had at Middletown (5/15) which was replicated at Willimantic (5/19), Danielson (5/20) and Norwich (5/21). At the latter stand, cold weather held down the crowds in the afternoon but this was more than made up for by a filled tent in the evening. However, it got so cold at night that few stayed to see the concert. At Danielson, on Sunday, the animal tent was blown down because of the severe winds and the animals were taken back to the stock car for the remainder of the day. While the parade and performance the next day were considered first class, the side show with its wide open gambling and questionable activities (coochie dancer) drew frank and very negative comment with the management being appropriately chastised. The good Connecticut tour ended at New London (5/22) where OK business was had. During the parade a small dog bit the tail of an elephant which greatly agitated the beast who turned on the dog and scattered the large nearby crowd. The elephant was brought under control by the "gentle" encouragement of the trainer and nothing untoward happened beyond this.

Mr. Robbins took his troupe directly east over the Rhode Island border to Westerly (5/23) where, despite the very cold weather, a very good day was experienced. The Heumans and the Ortons were cited as being the very best. Bristol (5/25) closed the very brief tour of the smallest state. The unseasonably cold weather continued to plague the show. However it was still a good day business-wise. The local paper commented as several papers had earlier that the show had been significantly enlarged since the prior appearance there (1905). This was apparently obvious in the much greater numbers of performers in the big top at any given time and the overall quality of the performance. Nice words and honestly felt. However with the greater number of performers comes an increase in pay-



The Barnum & Bailey menagerie in 1907. Pfening Archives.

roll which, in turn, demands consistent vibrant results at the ticket office. These needed results were not being experienced.

As the season entered June, surprisingly the weather became worse. Cold and rainy weather prevailed for weeks on end. And the business reflected the bad weather. The Massachusetts tour commenced at Tauton (5/27). In this town an elephant broke away from the handler and stampeded into the train depot restaurant whereupon she created havoc in the flower beds which were the pride of the depot master. This caused some strained glares during the loading process.

In the *Clipper* of June 22 there was a rare news item which, looking behind the words, was very informative regarding the then state of affairs on the show. It could have been written by Mr. Robbins but just as likely authored by Mrs. Robbins or Fred Beckman. It reads in part: "... (w)e are now entering upon our ninth week. (note--Bristol Rhode Island was the conclusion of the fifth week). We have never missed a performance, have commenced late once, and then only fifteen minutes. With very few exceptions the train has been unloaded by 6 a m., and while we have had a great deal of bad weather, we have never been short of workingmen in any department, the complement being one hundred and fifty, and the lowest number drawing pay at any one pay day has been one hundred and thirty-eight. For the first five weeks, the receipts were big, and the next two weeks, from a com-

bination of circumstances, fell off some. Since that time business has increased a little, probably owing to better weather. We have not had an accident to a horse, car, wagon or animal, but, on the other hand, have five colts that have been born since our opening. The public and press have been a unit in praising the show, not only for its excellent performances and the splendid condition of the entire outfit. In a great many instances we have made the towns for three years in succession, and all of them at least twice in three years, and in every case where the conditions were equal, the receipts have exceeded that of any previous visit. While we have never had occasion to turn any people away, we have done a very satisfactory business, but as our canvas is 150 round top, with three 50ft. middle pieces, fifty lengths of blues, twenty lengths of reserves, and six lengths of portable platform, we can do considerable business and not turn people away."

Analyzing this release, we find the averments regarding the amount of repeat business seems to be grossly overstated. While the business in the first five weeks was good, it did not nearly match the amazing business done at these locations in 1905 when turnaways were common. We do observe that the big top may have been larger in 1907 than the previous two years. However 150 with 3 50's seems somewhat large for a fifteen car show although not unprecisely so. We know from the local press that there had been some accidents but none that were very serious. We fully agree the show was very well received by every community of record but there were fre-



quent complaints for the widespread gambling. Lastly, and most importantly, was the degree of business of late. It appears clear that after Bristol, Rhode Island, business took a tumble. While it may have recovered somewhat, on the average one senses that many, many days were losers. No circus can sustain this for very long and Frank A. Robbins



The Ringling Swan bandwagon in 1907. Pfening Archives.

Circus was no exception to this rule.

As noted above the short Massachusetts sojourn began at Tauton (5/28) after a Sunday run of only 25 miles from the Saturday date at Bristol. For the next couple of weeks, Frank A. toured the greater Boston area where the Ringling Show was playing the Hub (5/27-6/1), and then was routed into the major population centers of that area including Providence (6/4-5), Fall River (6/6), New Bedford (6/7), and Brockton (6/8). It appears that this year the Ringling opposition really hurt business of the smaller Robbins Show. Tauton is but 20 or so miles from Providence. The next Robbins stand, Attleboro (5/29) is even closer. Although Milford (5/29), Marlborough (5/30) and Clinton (5/31) were further away from Providence, they were much closer to Ringling's Worcester date (6/3). Then a 50 mile move to the southeast didn't help much as it brought the Robbins aggregation to Middleborough (6/1) which was wedged between the Ringling's Fall River, New Bedford and Brockton dates, all of which were about 25 miles away in various directions. Proximity was even more serious at Abington (6/4) which was a mere five miles from Brockton. Jumping to the north shore did not provide the needed respite from the direct competition of the larger show because, guess what, Ringling did likewise. Ringling was at Lynn (6/10) and Salem (6/11), while our hero was at Danvers (6/8) a scant 10 miles away to the north. When a

show is so close to the enormous competition represented by a circus the size of Ringling, people in the inbetween towns and villages will almost always gravitate to the larger show. Less one thinks that Ringling represented the only threat to the Robbins troupe, be advised that an equally menacing organization was also lurking in the background, possibly representing a even greater problem for Frank A. The Buffalo Bill Wild West Show returned from four years in Europe this year and it was ready and able to do battle with any opposition including Ringling, much less Robbins. After a successful engagement in New York and Brooklyn, Buffalo Bill dallied in Philly for a week and then played a series of large cities up the east coast before reaching Boston on June 17th for a week's stand. It picked up a number of dates in southern New England including the ever popular Providence (6/24), Fall River (6/26), New Bedford (6/27), Brockton (6/28) and Tauton (6/29). Both the Ringling and Buffalo Bill shows experienced wonderful business at these locations with packed houses being the norm. Frank A. was lucky to escape with his last name intact. Like Mother Nature, some times it is not good to fool with the big boys, even if it is by accident.

Seeking a reprieve from this ruinous competition, Robbins exited into Maine for a long and hopefully

remunitive tour of the Pine Tree State. It wasn't to be. Of the first seven dates in Maine, four had huge stands of opposition paper hung in strategic locations. The large Ringling owned Forepaugh-Sells followed the Robbins dates by about 2 weeks at Bath (6/14), the state capital Augusta (6/17), Waterville (6/18) and Bangor (6/20). Lots of folks waited for the larger circus. A leap north to the small village of Kingman (6/21) and then to the Canadian border at another small town of Danforth did little to contribute to the eroding financial picture. A relatively short Sunday run southeast took the show to Calais (6/24) and then to Eastport. Both were normally fine Robbins dates but nothing notable happened here at the boxoffice. It was down the coast to Ellsworth (6/27) before reversing itself and heading directly north to the most remote areas of Maine, culminating at the border towns of Van Buren (7/5 and Fort Kent (7/10). In this general area, bears outnumbered people and bears are not known to purchase many circus tickets. While there wasn't competition so far north, nor was there much business. Heading quickly south through central part of the State, the Show finally had a real big day at Rumford (7/19) with capacity business at both performances. This momentary bit of happiness was quickly offset the next day at Bethel, where the big top experienced a very damaging blowdown at the beginning of the evening performance.





Miraculously, no one was injured as a result of the storm. The tent was repaired with dispatch but it did not give a good appearance on the lot. The unrewarding Maine tour finally ended at Hiram (7/24) near the border of New Hampshire. Eight dates in New Hampshire did little to alleviate the financial woes of Robbins. Recovery could only be found in a huge upswing in business. While the territory where the show was routed was well known to be prime circus areas, anything less than packed houses portended doom. The show could not tolerate any extended periods of bad weather. Meanwhile, Fred Beckman was booking the circus for its August dates and was intending to spend some serious time in Long Island and at the Jersey Shore. As reported in *Variety* (7/20), he gave up this idea when he discovered that the Great Fashion Plate Shows (Walter L. Main) had beat him to it and would be in many of his intended dates a week or so before him. Although he did book Robbins into a number of open Jersey Shore towns, he decided to skip Long Island altogether to avoid the direct competition to the extent possible.

August found the show heading south again. Torrington, Connecticut (8/6) and Winsted (8/7) turned in big days. The authorities in Winsted ordered certain undescribed objectionable dancing in the sideshow to be stopped which it was. In addition, the authorities also informed the show that no gambling would be per-

mitted while in that town and no gambling was to be found. (Damn these puritanical New Englanders) The local newspaper reported that the riding was not up to par but the outstanding aerial, bar and bicycle riding more than made up for this deficiency. The circus continued its rapid transit west arriving at Warwick, New York (8/12), which is just north of the New Jersey border, a few miles south of the city of Middletown, its winterquarters in 1889/1890. Two performers on the show Harry Miller and Anna Lalabaur, who resided in Reading, Pennsylvania, were married in Warwick to the best wishes of their colleagues. As neither had been mentioned in previous lists of performers, it may be assumed that both had been recent additions to the roster. Newton in northcentral New Jersey (8/13) gave good houses to very appreciative audiences. In fact, the evening turnout was a direct result of the very positive word of mouth compliments paid the circus by the folks who attended in the afternoon. During the concert after the evening performance, high winds ripped a large hole in the canvas which was cause for a quick exit of most of the concert patrons. It was but a short jump south to Washington New Jersey (8/14), where so-so business was had.

What follows is a remarkable

report filed in four segments in successive issues of *sby* the circus editor, a gentleman named Rush. It is significant in several ways. Seldom do we have an opportunity to read a professional writer's account about his real-time experiences on the show when the individual is an outsider to that circus itself and his stay is brief. It is also interesting that the writer selected Frank A. Robbins Circus to do his series. When one considers all of the circuses within the local area throughout the summer, including some which were much larger, it is significant the this selection was made. Was it just a matter of convenience or possibly more likely, that Mr. Robbins enjoyed such a good reputation with the media, his show was chosen? We shall never know although I think that the latter notion is persuasive.

The series is entitled *ON THE ROAD WITH A CIRCUS* and reads: "A busy schedule of one-day stands leaves the circus folk but little time for indulgence in the niceties of life, but even in the press and hurry of their nomadic existence they have time to observe the most careful rules of hospitality. In this respect the clan of 'the big top' has no better representative than Frank A. Robbins, a lifelong showman and managing director of the circus that carried his name these many years.

"Returning recently from a short tour with the circus, I can testify to the wholehearted kindness of Mr. Robbins and his business associate, Fred Beckman, who are handling the show on the road. Bad train connections, delayed train orders and other incidentals brought me into Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, where the circus was showing, late Thursday night, August 15. The big top was being taken down at the lot, a mile away from the railroad yards, and a stream of circus wagons trailed along the road, marking the winding path with flaring torches. In the confusion I waited to approach somebody for directions. A big six-horse wagon swung down the road and into the train yards, the driver working his leaders through the tangled maze with the ease of a practiced horseman. He pulled up at the visitor's





call and introduced himself as 'Charley' Robbins, the 'Governors' second son (sic). Under his pleasant guidance I was taken to the cars. 'The Governor' was in bed. Sleeping quarters were pretty much cramped, but nobody would hear of the visitor spending the night in a hotel. There were ten minutes of scurrying through the sleepers. Finally it was discovered that Mr. Beckman had half a berth to spare and cheerfully gave it up to the show's guest. In twenty minutes he was shown his sleeping quarters, introduced to the manager and barkeeper of the 'privilege' car, and so made a member of the Free and Accepted Order of Railroad Circus Folk, whose supreme privilege it is to get as much sleep as business and the train schedule will allow, make their money, spend it as they please, pay their own way at all times, and take odds of no man.

"Under the direction of 'Charley' Robbins the work of loading the show continued meanwhile. Although the haul was nearly a mile the show was neatly packed up by 12:30 and about 2 o'clock the train pulled out for the next stand, Bangor, Pennsylvania, a distance of about twenty miles. The show's business in Stroudsburg had been fairly good, but the edge was taken off by the visit of the Walter L.

Courier used by Main's Great Fashion Plate Shows. Pfening Archives.

Main 'Great Fashion Plate Shows' less than three weeks before. The Robbins outfit is following in the trail of the Main show and feeling it a little, although attendance has been well up. Main enjoys a good reputation in this section. He has played thereabouts for many years, putting up a consistently good show and working up a strong following. According to reports from townspeople (the people of the Robbins show refused to express an opinion on the point), this year's offering is a long way from the standard.

"Bangor is a town of 5,000 up in the mountains on a spur of the D. L. & W. Railroad. The circus train pulled into the railroad yards about 3 o'clock and by 6 the work of unloading had commenced. The lot was along the siding and the big top was spread in no time, Mr. Beckman directing the location of the tent and 'Frenchy' (Martin J.) Haley, the boss canvasman, superintending the work. It needs a superintendent. Canvasmen seem to be by nature 'soldiers' of the most determined sort. They work under a sort of subdued protest, but with Haley, Mr. Beckman

and the younger Robbinses seemingly all over the place at the same time, snapping out orders that were none the less sharp because they were quietly spoken, the canvas was spread into position and hauled tight before 10 o'clock. While the big top and menagerie tents were going up, Jack Kent, boss hostler, was keeping his gang on the jump spreading the horse tents and stabling the stock for the day. Nobody interferes with Kent in his own particular field. He's been in the circus game long enough to accumulate gray hair, and he knows his business.

"When I first took charge here," said Kent, marking a spot for a tent peg, 'everybody about the lot had sick feet. They wanted to borrow my ponies to ride from the ticket wagon to the cook house, and tried to make a riding academy out of the horse tents. I cured them of that, and now they walk.' Kent calls the stock 'my horses' and handles them as if they really were. This may be hard on the weary show people but if the condition of the animals is any indication it's good for the horses. They are a well cared for lot and the tents models of cleanliness.

"Frank Flynn, head waiter and general major domo of the commissary department, pitched his cook house just back of the big top, with the kitchen twenty feet beyond. Two hundred and fifty people are fed here daily, 150 laborers and 100 employed in the other branches of the show. The tent is divided down the middle with a canvas wall and the class mark is religiously observed. The food is solid and simple, running for the most part to roast beef and roast pork. A month or so ago when the show was up in Maine one of the performers taxed Flynn with his limited repertoire of meat courses, claiming that beef and pork had furnished the staple for ten days running. 'This ain't Delmonico's' retorted Flynn. 'If you want mocking birds, hike up to the hotel in town and eat yourself to death.' The performer took the hint. Picking out the most imposing hostelry in the place he gave himself into the hands of an obsequious waiter and settled himself at the table with an expectant smile. The waiter brushed off the table and fussed with the silverware to the limit of



patience, then queried anxiously: 'Will you have pork or roast beef, sir?' The performer hasn't criticized Flynn's choice of menu since.

"The side show tent took the king's position at the entrance to the lot

It is under the management of Harry Hodges who also runs the 'privilege' car. Hodges does his own talking in front of the side show, and during the Pennsylvania stands drew good business. His solemn and serious description of the wonders of the show was convincing enough to arouse the interest of the much more sophisticated crowd than that of a country town. The side show is made up of a quick sketch artist, a fortune teller, negro minstrel company of five, banjo player, Punch and Judy show, 'handcuff queen' and for an extra dime a 'couch' dancer who performs her Oriental wriggles under an adjoining canvas.

"The show carries a secretary, a bright, wide-awake young fellow (Clarence Farrell) whose business it is to write and answer business letters, and even he is not immune from the morning work. He directs the pitching of an office tent, and the unpacking of a complete field office equipment, including a typewriter, letter filing cabinet and writing tables. The Robbins family use this as headquarters during rest hours and here all the show business is transacted.

"At 10:30 the lot was in shape and a few minutes later the parade formed. The Frank A. Robbins show makes no great pretension to being a big or elaborate circus. Its chosen territory is where the population is amusement hungry, and where the standard of entertainment is not unduly high. The organization represents a nice balance between the lowest cost of operation and the highest degree of surface display. The parade takes about twelve minutes to pass a given point each morning. Marshall Pollard leads the way. It includes, besides the two band wagons drawn three teams each, the principal riders in a position of prominence near the head, the clowns disposed along the line, eight or nine animal cages and finally two elephants and a monster dromedary, said to be one of the largest in the country. The calliope, of course,

brings up the rear. The parade was out about an hour and a half in Bangor, returning to the lot at 12:30. The interval between this and the opening of the afternoon performance is resting time for the show people, except for such attention as they may give to putting the finishing touches upon the rigging of their apparatus under the big top.

"A huge bell announces dinner at 1 o'clock but with a show to follow shortly, the performers make rather a light meal of it, sometimes letting it pass altogether. The real meal of the day comes about 4 o'clock, Frank Flynn 'spreads himself.' It was just before dinner that I met 'the Governor.' Like a good general he realizes that his people must be well fed to render good service, and to this end he gives the commissary department his personal attention. He was giving instructions to Flynn when Jos. H. Highes, the press agent of the show, who kindly took me under his guidance, brought me forward for an introduction. Mr. Robbins is a middle-aged man slightly above average height and with a genial, ruddy face. He was busy with other things beside entertaining newspaper men, but he paused long enough to give me the characteristic circus welcome: 'Make yourself perfectly at home and stay as long as you like.'

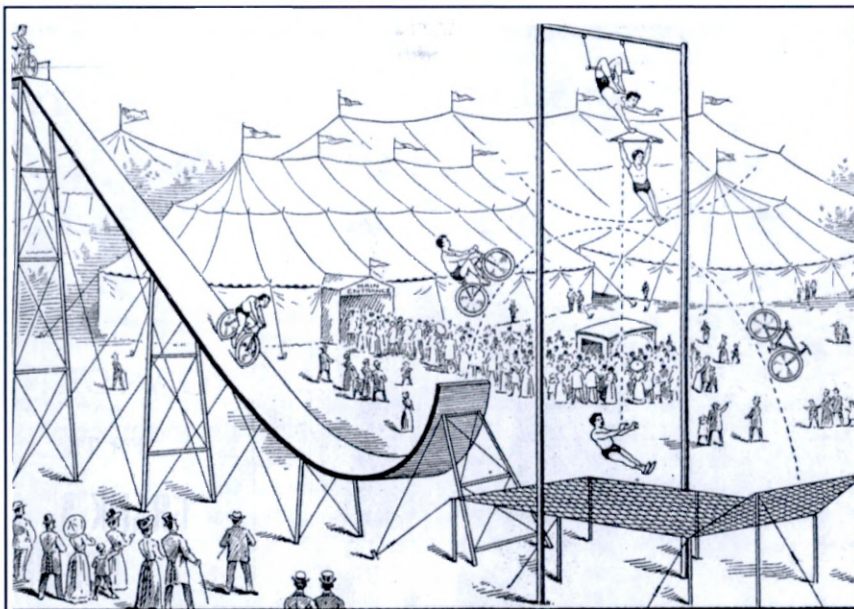
"A street fair and a medicine show, those fly-by-night birds of passage that are at once the bane and despair of the circus man, were in Bangor,

and their presence worked somewhat against the afternoon attendance. The place is known as 'a night town,' and little was expected of the matinee, but the lot began to fill up early. The crowd was mostly made up of women and children, and the candy butchers, slot machine moving picture and cane boys, all under the direction of Mrs. Robbins, did a thriving business, while Clarence Farrell sat in the red wagon and dispensed pasteboards with a bored and listless air because things weren't moving as swiftly as usual.

"The circus is given in two rings and a platform. There are five clowns, and they all work hard. They open with a clown song by all hands, followed by a dialogue involving a quaint advertising scheme for which Girard Leon is 'outside man.' Leon is the man credited with having invented the institution of the elephant banner. He is a clown and pantomimist of some note himself, but the advertising scheme occupies his attention exclusively just now. But more about and his publicity dodge anon.

"The Ortons with a high wire act are the first number. The trio is made up of a man and two children working out a good routine of balancing two and three high formations while riding a bicycle on the wire. The act is nicely handled, is a good

Illustration from a 1907 Robbins courier. Pfening Archives.





applause winner and all three dress prettily. The Aerial Lloyds, casting act, are the feature. William Lukens is the head of the act and arranged it. The rigging is hung about twenty feet above the net. The Lloyds are six in number, although only four of them are concerned in the casting act proper. The other two are children who fill in the breathing spaces with well executed work on the traps arranged just above the casting rig. They are a smooth-working quartet with few, if any, slips and a good finish. The Lloyds close the show. Three of the same people make up a comedy aerial bar act earlier in the proceedings. Two of the men work straight and the third does the comedy in the 'Dutch' makeup. The act moves swiftly with a series of clean leaps and catches from giant swings and half a dozen doubles into the net. The act has been a valued number with the show.

"John Rooney is principal rider. He first shows a simple jockey act with the usual mounting and dismounting in bareback riding and later has a really catchy specialty in the same class of work, finishing with several clean somersaults on the moving horse. He makes a first rate equestrian. He occupies the arena jointly with Josie Ashton, the principal female rider, in the familiar sort of act. The Marvelous Heumans, bicycle act, are a good feature. They are father, mother and son. Mr. Heuman supplies the comedy, well handled, while the other two execute a routine of well worked bicycle tricks. The Three Herbert Brothers feature a double somersault from the basket in their acrobatic act on the platform. It is a striking feat, and makes a good finish to a neat specialty. The three men dress well, changing entirely for each performance.

"Carlos and Silverton, tight wire, work out a fair act with a 'cake walk' finish. Mrs. Clark, single menage



Cover of the 1907 Robbins courier. Pfening Archives.

act, held the ring alone for twelve minutes with a pretty offering. Her mount is one of the best looking animals in the show, and runs through its tricks with little or no urging. Harry Koster makes a good finish in a breakaway arrangement to a novelty aerial act with Roman rings, trapeze and a series of foot loops. There are several doubles, mostly on the traps in which the young Ortons and the younger members of the Lloyds engage. These are besides a double by Koster on the traps and several made up specialties on the swinging ladder and rings.

"If putting up a circus tent is a swift and interesting performance, getting it down and loaded is infinitely more so. The process begins before the show is over. As soon as an aerial act is through with its per-

formance, the nets and rigging are rolled up in view of the audience, and by the time the performers are in their dressing room, it has started on its way to the cars. When the show is over, nets aerial paraphernalia and other apparatus have been removed and the arena is clean but for the central platform, which is required for the concert. In Bangor, where I watched the packing up process for the first time, they even removed half the platform and the performers who were concerned in the concert had to make the best of what was left. The concert is made of rather light entertainment. A dancing and singing sketch or two and a talking sketch by three of the clown, in eccentric makeup, together with a monologue by Debonair was the bulk of the show. Half a dozen musicians from the band furnished the accompaniment.

Debonair has a fairly interesting line of Irish talk, and a topical song made up of 'locals'. He was formally an aerial performer with the Ringling, but for the past six or seven years he has retired to 'ground work' of the singing and talking variety. By the end of the concert the interior of the top was almost cleaned up. The rest of the work, packing up the smaller articles of equipment occupied but a quarter hour, thanks to the valuable aid of a horde of small boys. The youngsters had been permitted to witness the show free on their promise to help afterward and to enforce this promise they left their caps as security. Shortly after 11 o'clock the arena was clean and 'Chandeliers,' the functionary whose business it is to care for the illuminating apparatus, carried out his gasoline fixtures. After a warning for everybody to get out from under, the signal was given to drop the canvas.



The top is divided into eight sections, which, laced together, form the umbrella-like tent. As the canvas dropped, sliding down the poles like a swelling parachute, a canvassman starts at the outer end of each seam, and works toward the center, unlacing rapidly as he goes. There was no occasion for urging haste tonight, for just at this time it began to rain, and the canvassmen, with the dismal prospect of handling a wet canvas in the morning, put on all speed forward. In a twinkling the work was accomplished, the different sections separated and rolled into fat bundles and distributed in two lines down the lot, which in the semi-darkness looked like a hay field with the grass piles into mows. This illusion was carried further when the big four-horse truck was driven down the center and the men in gangs of eight and ten whisked the bundles into the wagon, for all the world like a lot farmers loading hay. There remained then only the business of lowering the center poles. This is done by the simple process of paying out one of the guy ropes until the tall sticks come gently to the ground. They are then fitted snugly into compartments rigged over the wheels of the trucks filled with the smaller sticks used for props, quarter poles, etc. These go on the train last, together with the wagons packed with tent stakes, in order to be quickly available for unloading at the next stand. With that the work of loading was complete.

Perhaps it was because the managers of the Lackawanna Railroad were to busy writing "Phoebe Show" ads to attend to their proper business that the show train was held up in a siding for three hours somewhere between Bangor and our next stand, Dover, New Jersey, waiting for a new train crew, to take us through the rest of the 53-mile jump. This circumstance brought the show rather later into Dover, but traveling with a circus breeds infinite philosophy, and the only comment made was a mild discussion upon the relative expertness of Eastern and Western railroad men. If I remember rightly Mr. Beckman got the decision on the contention that there weren't any good railroads anywhere.

"I started for the show lot a mile

away, but on the way met Girard Leon and got interested in his advertising campaign. It is Leon's business to promote publicity in the interest of local merchants. He will compose a dialogue running something like this:

"First clown (displaying a paper package)--Know what I got here? Second clown (violently interested)--No. What? F. C. (simulating enthusiasm). A beautiful washboiler (or statuette, or silver jewel-case, as the case



may be) South Carolina--(With emotion)--Where did you get it? F. C.--Why, at the Bee Hive Five and Ten Cent Store. South Carolina--Who runs the Bee Hive store? F. C.--(pityingly)--Why, don't you know? It's John B. Doe, the best hardware dealer in Blankville.'

"For a consideration Leon will have a dialogue repeated in a loud voice by the clowns before the assembled audience by the clowns before the assembled audience at the show. Leon is a hypnotic salesman, and if the local merchant can't be interested in this device he has a whole series of advertising schemes to offer equally as good. But Leon was discouraged this morning, . . . he confided to me. Up to this time his campaign had consisted of a visit to the saloon across the street from the railroad station and a halfhearted look down the length of Main Street. He couldn't tell me how he knew he had struck a barren field except that 'he could always tell.' His intuitive 'hunch' proved the right one, and although he hustled on business until two hours after the parade had passed through the main streets, it turned out that he had guessed right. One hotel keeper out of a visiting list of thirty made up the 'bag' for the day. Leon boasts he can 'size up' a

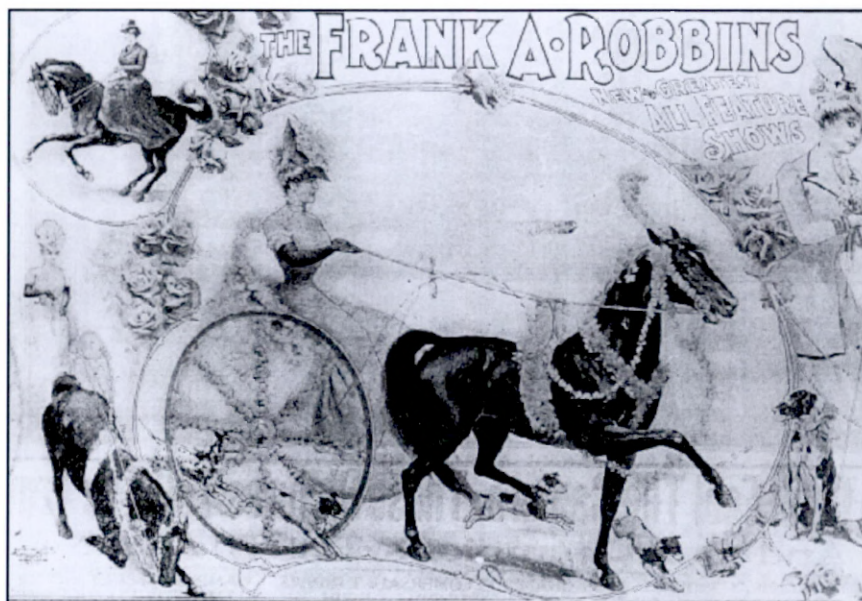
town from the railroad station and the nearest cafe, and from the experience of that Saturday, I'd hate to make book against his 'hunches'.

"The afternoon and night business was only fair with the show, and at midnight we were off for Somerville, New Jersey--that is to say, some of us were off to Somerville, for in the afternoon press agent Hughes and young Robbins left for a pleasure trip to New York and Coney Island over Sunday. Sunday morning about a dozen others followed on a recreation bent. Sunday is loafing day for everybody except the 'twenty-four hour man', the agent who travels on day ahead.

The Robbins show has no Sunday performance, and this gives the circus people an opportunity to luxuriate in hotel accommodations until Monday night. The Robbins agent carries standing orders for fifty persons or so, and when the Sunday town does not contain enough rooms with baths attached, he has his own troubles portioning out the available supply. In addition to the exquisite delight of having nothing to do and sleeping in a regular bed that doesn't swing around curves and bump over railroad ties, Sunday is a day much to be desired for it is 'kale day on the lot,' that is to say, salaries are paid, and one may experience that delightful combination of having and plenty of time to spend it in. The edge of this experience was somewhat dulled in Somerville, because Somerville is in New Jersey, and there is no place to squander money in on Sunday. So everyone loafed about the lot--every one except the workmen. The canvases were put up upon arrive, but that job was completed by noon and thereafter even they laid off. The candy booths were open for business, but that was the extent of the Sunday activity.

"It was then that I began to realize why Hughes had seemed so pleased to get away to Coney. Somerville is a pretty place and Coney Island is hot, just and noisy. I was inclined to question Hughes and the others' good taste, but with the monotony of sitting around the lot with nothing to do and nothing to watch, Somerville became a highly undesirable place to be in. The monotony drove me back to the empty cars and the empty cars





Litho used by Robbins in 1907.  
Pfening Archives.

drove me back to the lot. Then the luminous thought struck me that by sprinting I could catch a train that would take me back to New York in time to catch the last two acts at Hammerstein's. I'm afraid my adieus to 'the Governor' and Mr. Beckman were a bit hasty and incoherent, but I was a stranger in a strange land and I had only twenty minutes to get that train.

"It's a fine, carefree life when there's motion and action on foot, but there's twenty-eight weeks to the season. That's twenty-eight Sundays and huge heaven and the man who routes the show alone know how many Somevilles that's going to mean."

So ends three days in the life of Frank A. Robbins and his circus.

In a parallel article in the August 31 issue of *Variety*, it was reported that Robbins followed Walter L. Main "Fashion Plate Shows" through Pennsylvania and New Jersey at an interval of about three weeks. "The Main outfit has worked this territory pretty steadily for a number of years back and building up a good reputation by means of a consistently excellent show. Ahead of Robbins they escaped all opposition and, thanks to the show's reputation, drew good business. But this year's offering is far below standard, according to the townspeople along the route, and people left the show with the feeling that they had been 'stung'. Following into a territory of this sort the edge was taken off the business of the

Robbins show, although in Stroudsburg, and Bangor, Pennsylvania, and Dover, New Jersey, where the Robbins circus showed last week, the attendance was good. Last week the Robbins show played the chain of summer resorts along the Jersey coast, where conditions are different. Main played this territory about the middle of July. At that time the resort hotels had not begun to fill up, but now they are crowded and the Robbins show drew big attendance from this source."

Local newspapers confirm the level of business as good at Stroudsburg and Dover. This pace continued at Somerville (8/19) where two capacity houses were enjoyed. A 50 mile jump took the show to Keyport (8/20), the initial Jersey Shore town. Asbury Park (8/24) filled the tents with very appreciative audiences. The concert in that locale was also well attended. Long Branch (8/26) was followed by Lakewood, Toms River and Barnegat, winding up the shoreline communities. Saturday (8/31) found the Show on the Delaware River at Camdem across from Philadelphia where a fine day's business was experienced. One of the first use of photographs in Robbins' newspaper ads was observed at Toms River where an unidentified couple was boldly displayed. Robbins was always quick to subscribe to new and attractive forms of eye-catching advertising

techniques in order to capture the attention of the entertainment minded public.

September took the show back into Pennsylvania at Norristown (9/2), just north of Philadelphia. Good attendance was had in the afternoon but less than one thousand attended at night. Only mediocre reviews of the performance were present in the local papers. Quakertown followed with a good afternoon and capacity night. The parade wasn't considered much but the performance was judged OK. The care given the animals was apparent and much appreciated. It was only about a 15 mile jump to Doylestown (9/4) the next day but with the circus came the rains. However the Bucks County Seat locals came out in droves with umbrellas at the evening performance and used their protection inside the tents as well as outside. When it poured outside it did likewise inside. The folks thought the show to be first class. The paper conjectured that there would have been capacity business had the weather permitted same. (Take that to your favorite banker when seeking a loan.) Good business was registered at Pottstown (9/6).

The show continued in Pennsylvania heading west although touching the coal country at Schuylkill Haven (9/10) and Tamaqua (9/11). At the latter date heavy rains delayed the parade until 12:30. Conditions caused it to be an abbreviated one both in distance and participation of the circus. Worse yet there was a blowdown on the lot and the tents had to be reerected thereby causing a cancellation of the afternoon performance. Not so many folks showed up in the evening making this a not-so-good date overall. A much better day was experienced at Ashland (9/12) but it is very difficult to make up for the big losers such as Tamaqua. Carlisle (9/14) finished the up and down week with OK business to pleased patrons. The night house was particularly good.

Relatively good business was repeated at Shippensburg (9/16). The dark cloud of doom prevailed the next day at Chambersburg. A deluge soaked the afternoon attendees causing many to leave the performance. The frequently repaired tent afford-



ed no protection whatsoever. In fact it seemed to direct frequent waterfalls to where the drenched patrons were seated. Everyone that remained were in good spirits, greatly admiring the fortitude of the performers who earnestly tried to present a worthwhile program. The weather caused it to be curtailed. The night house was poorly attended because of the treacherous weather. Despite the rains again following the show at Waynesboro (9/17), the performances did go on as scheduled, as did the parade. The parade was characterized as splendid, as was the program of acts. Good business was had at both performances with the evening being particularly good. Business was not only as good at the box office; it was what was under the shell that really counted. Just ask the local farmer who lost \$250 to the artist with the large nuts. After seeking solace from the local law, the artist was compelled to return \$200 to the farmer, but \$50 for a few minutes' work isn't so bad after all. The last day in Pennsylvania was at Gettysburg (9/18) where the rains again prevented the deserved attendance. Those that came liked what they saw but there weren't too many of them. Great reviews notwithstanding, the weather was killing the show.

The Frank A. Robbins Circus was now in its home stretch, in more ways than one. It headed south with a date at Winchester, Maryland (9/20). It was reported in the local newspaper that Mr. Robbins attempted to lease the fairgrounds as its winterquarters but finally gave up because the fair officials were so slow in responding to inquiries. Bad weather continued to dog the show.

At Berryville, Virginia (9/24), a good afternoon was followed by a canceled night performance due to a severe storm breaking around 6 PM. With a break in the weather, Charlottesville (9/30) responded with two good houses. The jump to the next stand (Staunton) was marred by the death of a Staunton 16 year old. The lad went to Charlottesville with several of his friends to catch the performance and then sneak a ride back to Staunton on the circus train. About 2 miles east of Afton, several of the cages were wrenched loose and

the steam calliope was thrown from the train. Unfortunately the young men were asleep in the calliope when the accident occurred. The decedent died from his injuries shortly after the accident. Two other car hoppers were injured, neither seriously. Three more escaped without any injury. An inquest found that the death was an accident and the circus was not liable in any way. Although delayed by the accident, the circus paraded about on schedule to an appreciative crowd and the afternoon performance drew well. Good business was repeated at Charleston, West Virginia (10/4), but it was too late.

The show headed north playing or at least billing Bristol, Pennsylvania (10/7) and Princeton, New Jersey (10/8). There is no indication that those dates were actually played. It appears as though Mr. Robbins was intending to take the train back to the quarters in Jersey City and play about a week as an overland circus in nearby communities. Towns such as Weehawken (10/10), followed by Englewood, Hackensack, Rutherford, Bloomfield, Arlington and finally Kearney were scheduled. We know for sure that Englewood, Hackensack and Rutherford were billed. In the Englewood paper, it was stated that the circus never showed up, while at Hackensack and Rutherford, nothing was mentioned about the circus actually performing. In the past, local newspapers at the latter two locations reported in detail about circus day. It could be that the Robbins circus got to the winterquarters and there was insufficient incentive to continue. The Billboard stated in its October 26 issue that the show drove to winterquarters from the closing stand instead of shipping as usual. It also mentioned that it had a good season. So it may be that at least

**DANIELSON, Monday, May 20.**

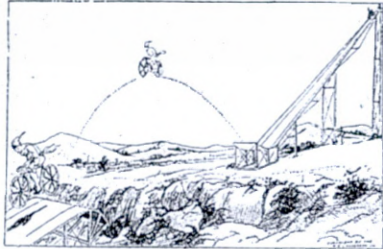
ORDER THEIR HUGE HAPPY DAYS WATERPROOF PAVILIONS.

**The FRANK A. ROBBINS**  
NEW GREATEST ALL FEATURE SHOWS.

Gross of Animals, Acts, Antics and Attractions. Room for Ten Thousand to Enjoy a Thousand Revels.

**THE TRIBUNAL OF NATIONS.**  
A SUPERB-SPLENDID PAGEANT REFLEX OF HEROIC HISTORY. Jousting, Lion Somersaults, Triumphal Wreath and Soldier Charges. Living Portraits of the Legendary Warriors and Heroes of the Past and Present. Maritally and Socially Abandoned and Arranged in Spectacular Facilities of the Actors and Regals of Their Eras.

**THE PARADE OF RADIANT, ROMANTIC REALISM.**  
**THE VERY CREAM OF EARTH'S GREAT CIRCUSES.**  
THE WORLD'S MOST WONDERFUL BARBECUE EQUESTRIAN, Saddle Somersaults—Narrow Gauges—Revelations and Revelations in Juggling, Original Wrestling—The Enchantment of Horses—The Greatest of Artists.



**A HOST OF CLOWNS THAT CATER TO A NATION.**  
Whose Juggles and Tricks of Popular Laughter, Exquisite Puppets, Fools and Follies Make Folks Fall Off Their Seats.

**Most Surprising Reasts of Many Species.**  
A Cate, Canine and Canine Actors to Chase the Children.

The Animal Stars of All Arenas. A Marvelous Melody Accompanying of Wondrous Wags.

**Worth Their Weight in Gold in a Weary World.**  
**THE COMING OF ALPHA AND OMEGA.**  
**DARE-DEVIL RIVALRY ABOVE A YAWNING DEATH TRAP.**

**Flying Aboard Across a Dirty Gap of Fifty Feet.**  
**THIS FEARFUL MID-AIR FIGHT FOR FAME** Which Makes the Brave Feet and Frenzy. Which Submerges Appearances in Air-Race Admiration. Is Wonderful Beyond the Power of Words. Prudently Beyond the Scope of Death. An Event of International Sensation.

**REPRODUCTION OF A TRIUMPHAL FETE IN TOKIO.**

some of the nearby dates were made. Regarding having a good season, this was just playing to the media. Plainly stated, it was over. The ownership partners put the circus up for sale.

Robbins newspaper ad used in 1907. Author's collection.

In preparation for the sale, Frank A. wrote a letter dated 15 November to his partner and friend, Louis Cooke. It reveals the sorry

financial condition the circus was in as well as the mood of the principal owner. It reads: "The 4 horses arrived in pretty good shape. Will offer them for sale Monday. It never rains but it pours. Mr. Carroll (probably the animal dealer Fiss, Doerr & Carroll) writes me he cannot carry as much as we owe him on a/c of the money conditions (Robbins may be referring to the situation resulting from the failure of several Trust firms which speculated in the New York real estate market and lost heavily thereby bringing about the Panic of 1907. Although this financial panic was short-lived and primarily affected the New York banking community and the stock market, its effect could have easily reached such risky borrowers as circus promoters). Got credit for \$325 from Kindly (sic). The expense attached to same was about \$25. I will run over for a few minutes Sunday. I could probably find someone to take up Mr. Cole's claim and add something to it. I am all in. It will take all that my wife and self have got to get through tomorrow. I changed \$700 from my personal account to the shows and I find I have overdrawn my account \$50. If the wild west could use a flat car, the one at Lakeview is a good one. Mr. McLaughlin said he would



like awful well to have it, the time Mr. Cole sent him to look at the cars."

This missive to Louis Cooke was followed shortly thereafter by another which provides a detailed account of the physical nature of the circus. It is dated 21 November and reads "Yours with ad enclosed rec'd. I will stop in the *Clipper* office today and leave it. This show at 50% if new would inventory about \$35,000. There is no way that any one could duplicate it for that. There is very few wagons in show business as good. None better and mighty few cars any companies (?). As far as the stocks and flats go, all exactly are 60 ft long, 8 feet wide, 4 needle bearings, latest improved air brakes etc. The stuff all together and freight etc. amounts to a whole lot. The horses are fat and fine and Louis with any kind of a feature, the show ought to make a lot of money. If any answer comes, will bring it over. Sincerely, Frank A. Robbins PS I refused \$350 for the camel yesterday"

Attached to this letter is the inventory that apparently was generated by Mr. Robbins.

#### Wagons

15 baggage wagons @ \$200 ea. \$3,000

5 Open dens @ \$300 ea. \$1,500

5 cages @ \$200 ea. 1,000

1 Ticket wagon \$300

3 miniature cages @ \$100 ea. \$300

1 Calliope \$1,000

Sub total \$7,100

#### Cars

9 flats @ \$500 ea. \$4,500

3 stocks @ \$750 ea. \$2,250

1 sleeper \$1,000

1 sleeper \$600

1 advertising car \$650

Sub total \$9,000

#### Horses

45 baggage and riding horses \$200 ea. \$9,000

13 ponies and bronchos @ \$100 ea. \$1,300

4 colts @ \$37.50 ea. \$150

2 donkeys @ \$25 ea. \$50

Sub total \$10,500

#### Miscellaneous

Harness for 60 horses with collars @ \$16 ea. \$1,000

Lights @ 50% value new. \$500

Seats @ 50% value new. \$500

Poles @ 50% value new. \$500

Tools, wardrobe, canvas, etc. \$900

Sub total	\$3,400
Animals	
Elephant \$1,500	
Antelope \$100	
Camel \$500	
A ? \$100	
2 ? \$250	
Hyena 4100	
Sloth bear \$100	
Lioness \$250	
Sub total	<u>\$2,800</u>
Grand total	\$32,800

Some observations regarding this inventory. It appears that having only two sleepers for a show of this size begs the question of adequacy. There may have been another sleeper that was leased or already sold off. We know that the animal inventory seems very modest. For instance, we know that two elephants were on the show throughout the season. Again the second elephant may have been leased or more likely already sold off. The remainder of the animal list seems sparse in view of the positive comments about the parade and menagerie that were received from local newspapers throughout the season. I suspect that some of the animals may have been traded to Fiss, Doerr & Carroll to reduce the outstanding bills with that firm. It is noted that the big top canvas was not identified specifically. This is probably because it had little future use given its marred condition because of the blowdowns experienced.

Failure again placed Frank A. behind the eight ball. There is no question that he and his associates worked hard at achieving success. However, you can't bank good effort. Profits were what it was all about and there just wasn't any. The 1907 season had excellent prospects for success. The economy was good. The show enjoyed an excellent reputation in almost every community on the route. Many were repeat stands, maybe too many. However, it seemed that in this year, bad weather followed the show throughout the entire year, sometimes weeks on end of rain and cold. Performances were lost, indeed days were lost and not because the circus wasn't in town, but because weather conditions did not permit going on with the performance. In some locales where the program did go on, the weather held the audience to a mere shadow of what was required in order to keep it on the road. As far as can be determined, payrolls were met. Most of the performers continued for the entire season. Workman help seemed to be always available. But the help that was needed at the box-office never showed up.

The high expectations that were shared by the owners in 1905 went down the storm drains in 1907. Incredibly what couldn't happen again, it did in fact happen again and with it Frank A.'s dreams of glory in the future.

# Happy Holidays

## Dave Price

### CHS Secretary-Treasurer

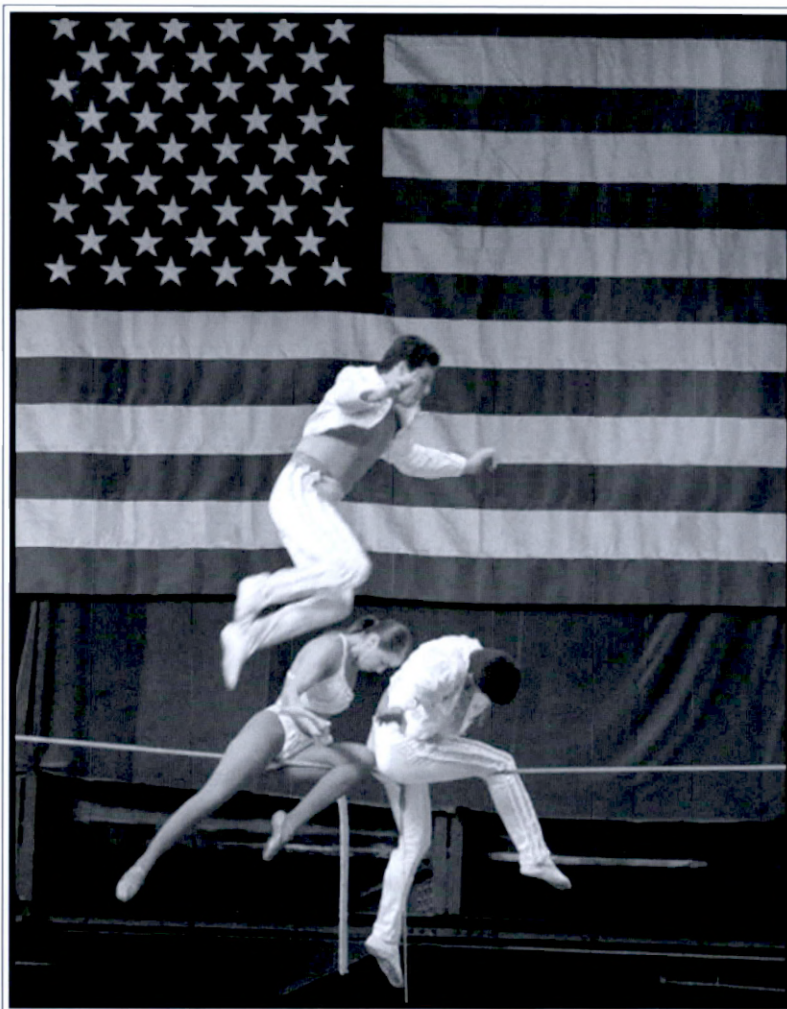


# THE BIG E SUPER CIRCUS

In Conjunction With

*Tommy and Struppi Hanneford*

Salutes



PEDRO CARRILLO AND THE CLOUD WALKING CARRILLOS



**EASTERN STATES EXPOSITION**

1305 Memorial Avenue • West Springfield, Massachusetts 01089  
Telephone 413-737-2443 • Fax 413-787-0127 • [www.thebige.com](http://www.thebige.com)

Wayne McCary, President

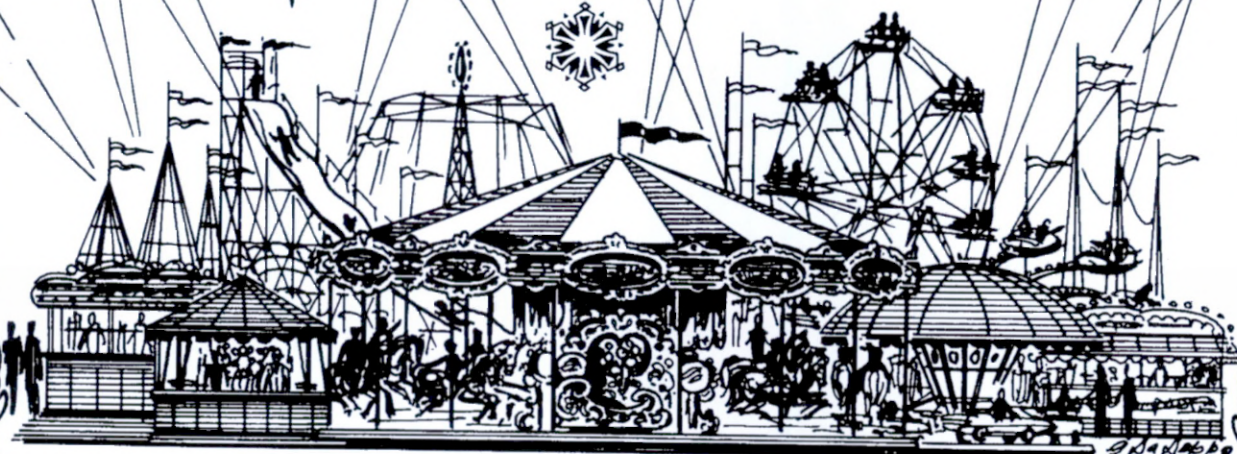




WISHES  
YOU AND YOURS

Happy  
Holidays!

JIM ELLIOTT  
GENERAL MANAGER







THE HAWTHORN TIGERS  
AND ELEPHANTS  
PERFORMING AROUND THE WORLD  
**SEASON'S GREETINGS**

The Hawthorn Corporation  
23675 W. Chardon Rd.  
Grayslake IL 60030-9584  
847/546-0717 Fax 847/546-3454



# Happy Holidays



If you would like one of our 2002 Circus Calendars,  
send \$3.00 to cover postage to:

GRAPHICS 2000 • 6290 HARRISON DR., SUITE 16 • LAS VEGAS, NV 89120



# Side Lights On The Circus Business

## PART TWENTY

By David W. Watt

*Editor's note. The dates listed are the days the article appeared in the Janesville, Wisconsin Gazette.*

**January 2, 1915**

In the review of side show freaks and curiosities of last week, there were two great features of side shows 30 years ago that were overlooked, and these were Tom and Hattie, known as the Wild Australian Children, and Henry Cooper, the English giant. Tom and Hattie perhaps made more money for their employers than any attraction in the business. They were called the Wild Australian Children, and were supposed to have been captured after a long, excited chase in the wilds of Australia. But as I did not participate in the capture, I will not vouch for the truth of this statement.

Tom and Hattie were the one great feature in the side show of the Adam Forepaugh show for many years. They were brother and sister, and both had the same attendants, whose business it was to look after them and see that they were cared for in the best possible way. Hattie had a bright disposition and everything seemed to please her, and she was everybody's friend; but Tom, the brother, was quite different. He was naturally a grouch and hard to please, and for some unknown reason he took a great dislike to me from the first time I ever saw him. Any time when I happened to walk in the side show, while Tom could not talk, he would give me a bad look, grit his teeth and clench his fists, which meant that I had better keep my distance.

One day John A. Forepaugh, who was manager of the show and owner of the privileges as well, came to the ticket wagon and said, "Dave, you talk about standing room, you could not put a dozen more people in the



Hattie and Tom, pinheads on Adam Forepaugh. Pfening Archives.

side show unless you put the press on them. I never saw such a big crowd. Run over and take a look."

I went to the side show and was just able to get inside when Tom, away across the tent, spied me and seemed to be wild with rage. And without thinking I clinched one of my fists and shook it at him and he immediately jumped from the stand on which he was exhibited into the crowd and let a yell out of him, and in ten minutes everybody had made their escape from under the wide walls. Tom was put back on his platform and sat down hard, with instructions to never get until he was told. I also made my escape to the ticket wagon, and a minute later I had orders from Mr. Forepaugh from then on to keep out of the side show.

Henry Cooper, the English giant, was brought to this country by Adam

Forepaugh on a three-year contract. Cooper stood about eight foot four, and while he was not fleshy, he weighed around 400 pounds. Everything Cooper wore had to be made to order, and his boots were a sight to look at. Cooper once told a story about an old lady visiting him in the side show and after looking him over carefully, she said, "Young man, can you tell me how tall you are?"

Cooper said, "No madam, not in feet and inches, but I am so tall that I cannot tell when my feet get cold."

The old lady took a look at Cooper's ponderous feet for a few seconds, and then said, "You are certainly fortunate," and without a smile on her face, passed on to the next stand to take a look at the fat woman.

For some years in this country, Henry Cooper was a feature in the side shows and in the winter in a dime museum.

A few days ago Mary A. Forepaugh, wife of the late John Forepaugh, died at her home in Philadelphia. Her husband, John Forepaugh, was the youngest brother of the great showman, and Aunt Mary, as she was known around the show, was a bright cheery woman, and a great favorite of her brother-in-law, Adam Forepaugh. At the opening in Philadelphia every spring, Aunt Mary could be found in the private box of Adam Forepaugh. At the close of the engagement there, she made it her business to visit everyone around the show and bid them farewell, always saying that she hoped to see them there the next spring. Many an old timer in the business will mourn her loss.

One of the wittiest and most original of the old-time circus jesters was Johnny Patterson, the self styled "Rambler from Clare," who was a true son of the "Land of the



Shamrock" and racy of the old sod. He was not a tumbling clown, a knockabout or a pantomimic buffoon; but he was a talking and singing-jester who relied upon his fund of natural humor and glib [gift] of repartee to excite the hilarity of his listeners.

Patterson came to this country direct from Ireland about 1879, under contract to the Cooper & Bailey Great London Show; and after remaining one season with that organization, he joined the forces of John B. Doris and toured for four seasons with the Doris Inter-Ocean Show. Although "blessed with the cause of conviviality," as they say in Ireland, Patterson managed to accumulate a tidy sum out of his weekly wage, and with this he returned to his native land and bought a half interest in a small circus managed by a man named Keely.

The show was re-christened the Keely & Patterson Shows and enjoyed deserved popularity, playing in the small Irish towns and cities. After the death of his partner, Patterson married Mrs. Keely. He continued to delight his countrymen with his songs and witticisms until he was laid low with the quick consumption after a brief illness. He died in August 1889, at the small town of Tralee in the south of Ireland while the rain poured in torrents upon the canvas roof of the dressing tent. Despite the pleadings of his faithful wife, he refused to be moved to the hotel or local hospital, declaring with the true circus spirit that if death was coming, to meet him "on the lot."

Johnny Patterson was one of the first clowns to impress himself on my juvenile memory. I saw him with the Doris show; and many years after, I had an interesting talk about him with the late John B. Doris. What made Patterson so unique a figure among the clowns of his day was the spontaneity of his wit and his fresh and unconventional humor. He did not peddle around a stale bag of hackneyed jokes. Often, as Mr. Doris told me, he would bound into the ring and take the ringmaster by surprise with a batch of unpremeditated jokes that sprang from his Celtic imagina-

tion, on the spur of the moment and as fast as he could utter them. Possessed of a fine light baritone voice that would not have been amiss in romantic opera, he sang with excellent effect such songs of his own composition as "Bridget Donoughue," "The Rambler from Clare," "The Garden Where the Praties Grow," and "There Never Was a Coward Where the Shamrock Grows."

Even when death was staring him in the face, Patterson retained his flow of fan and philosophy. He was in very truth the Sir Lucius O'Trigger of the circus arena.

The doctor who attended him in the dressing tent the night that he died remarked, "Well Patterson, I'll be around and see you in the morning."

"Ah, yes, Doctor, you'll see me," said Johnny, "but will I see you?"

The dying clown's words were prophetically true, for when the doctor came to the circus lot in the morning, Johnny Patterson's eyes were closed in the eternal sleep.

#### January 16, 1915

In 1882, when I made my engagement with Adam Forepaugh for that season, I knew nothing about conditions that existed in and around the show. I simply knew that I was to take charge of the ticket wagon--sell the tickets, pay the bills, and pay the people. But what had become of the man that had been there and why he did not stay, I knew nothing. The show opened on Thursday in Washington, D. C., and I arrived there on Tuesday of the same week. But I had no more than found my way to the show grounds and told Mr. Forepaugh who I was until I could see that I was looked upon by the average person around the show as a real curiosity.

The man whose place I was to take



Johnny Patterson, the well-known clown. Pfening Archives.

was Ben Lusbie, who had filled his position ably for thirteen years. Ben was a great ticket seller and always was a good fellow and [was] beloved by everyone around the show.

While they did not have anything against me, for they did not know me, yet Lusbie had been their friend in every way for many years. In the books, as they are called around the show, the odds were many to one that I could not fill the bill.

We showed in Washington three days, which many an employee around the show said would be as long as I could last. I never will forget a young man that sold reserve seat tickets who had been with the show for three years, and as he had to get his tickets from me, and to account to me for them when he was through selling, we were immediately thrown together. I had no more than handed him his tin box from which he sold his tickets, when he looked up at me and said, "How long do you expect to stay here?"

"Young man," I said to him, "you know there is an old saying that



'church is never out until the singing.' I have always been in the habit in the business of hearing them sing."

He turned away and went into the show.

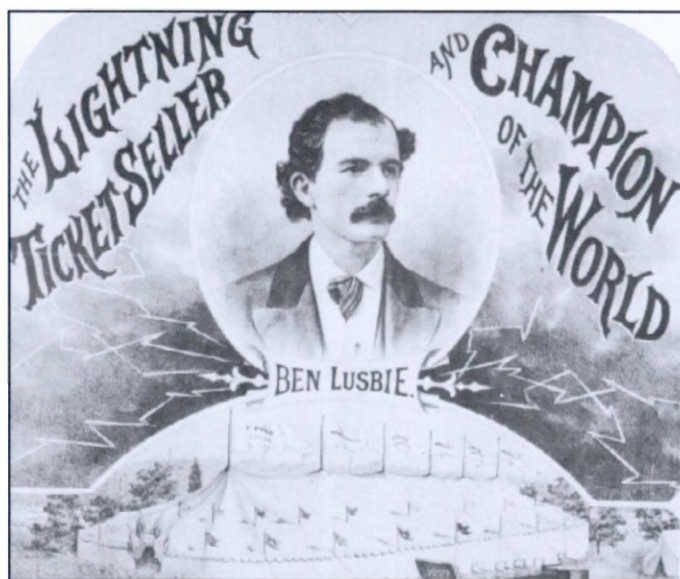
I got through the three days all right in Washington. From there we went to Baltimore for three days and everything went smoothly. The following Monday we opened in Philadelphia for two weeks, and that being the winter quarters of the show, and Mr. Forepaugh being a favorite in the city, we turned away people almost every afternoon and, as many times, at night would turn away thousands. And here it was where they expected me to fall down. But everything went right, and after leaving Philadelphia, it was not so long until one of the bosses around the show came to the ticket wagon one afternoon and commenced to relate his troubles to me. This was the first intimation I had had that perhaps I might be a fixture--when one of the bosses would come and make a confidante of me, or that he had heard from some source that I was making good. He was telling me something that the "old man," as he called Mr. Forepaugh, had done that he did not approve of and asked me my opinion.

I said, "Dan, that is something I know nothing about. And to tell you the truth, I have been so busy trying to please the 'old man,' as you call him, that he might [have] made 100 mistakes and I never would have known it, for I was only too glad if I could make good myself."

It was some two or three weeks later that the same young man that asked me in Washington how long I expected to stay, came to the wagon one afternoon and handed me a paper from Mr. Forepaugh, saying "Pay this man off. His first name was Arthur."

"Art, I am sorry to see you go," I said. "Can not it be fixed up in some way so that you can stay with the show?"

I meant it; and although he had not been my friend, he was good in



Ben Lusbie, the "Lightning Ticket Seller." Pfening Archives.

the business and I would like to have seen him stay.

"No," he said, "the Governor, said it was no use. I had to go."

I paid Arthur off and when he bade me good-bye he said to me, "Dave, I guess you will have to listen to the singing for both of us."

In many cases with a big show like that, with so many hundreds of employees, it seemed as though when they had been there about so long they made up their minds that it would be difficult for the show to run without them. That was when they lost out. Many times there would be a dozen or more people paid off in one day. And occasionally there would be one among them that would certainly surprise you, for they had been there so many years they were supposed to be a permanent fixture. However, in the years that I was with the show, I found out one thing, and that was that whatever your position was, fill it to the letter and never pay any attention to anything else.

Mr. Forepaugh had trouble with the door tenders one day and discharged two of them; and when he came out to the wagon to count up the afternoon house, he was very much excited and told me that it was a wonder that I did not know what was going on there and tell him. The main entrance of the show was some five or six rods from my wagon, and

impossible for me to know what was going on there. And, then again, I had troubles enough of my own to look after.

One afternoon a bystander stepped up to the ticket wagon and asked me how many elephants we had in the show. I quickly answered him, "Twenty."

He looked at me and asked, "Have you counted them?"

"No," said I, "I don't have to. Did you not see on the bills we had 20 elephants with the show?"

"Yes," he said, "I saw that and I also saw that you advertise that this is the largest show in the world."

"Well," I said, "if that's on the bills, then we have it. For we never advertise anything that we cannot show"

"Well," he said, "last year I went to the Barnum show and they, too, advertised many elephants and the largest show in the world." "Well, would you believe anything that old Barnum would tell you?" "Why should I not believe him as well as I would Mr. Forepaugh?" "I will tell you. To commence with, P. T. Barnum, is the wily old Yankee that makes no pretense of telling the truth, while Adam Forepaugh is a plain, everyday Philadelphia Dutchman, that could not tell a lie if he wanted to. That is just the difference."

Then my visitor turned and walked away smiling, saying, "I guess it is no use to talk to you, and anyway either one of the shows are large enough."

Mr. Forepaugh was back of me counting up the house and after he had counted through, he told me when the show closed that I had better stay in the winter quarters for a time and help the newspaper man write up a few advertisements for the coming year.

I thanked him and said, "Governor, nothing doing. I have troubles enough of my own right here in the wagon, and you will never find me very far away from it."

The showmen's Christmas dinner



at the Gunter this year was one of the most unique entertainments and by far one of the most successful Christmas cheer gatherings ever witnessed in San Antonio. The Gunter Hotel lobby was beautifully decorated with Christmas decorations and a large Christmas tree was erected for the benefit of all the showmen and their families and friends. One of the unique features of the affair was a one ring continuous performance in the afternoon, which was carried on to the evident delight of all who were fortunate enough to attend until the Christmas dinner was called at 5:30.

It was a great affair. Showmen and laymen were unanimous in that verdict when the curtain fell that night. The showmen gladly gave their tribute to San Antonio and what it stands for, and the laymen were happy that the occasion had come to pass which brought them closer to these "gypsies," whose existence in other years had been veiled in mystery. In these confessions, San Antonians [knew] the show folk were human after all.

This celebration began with the playing of Christmas melodies on chimes by the Burdick brothers, a double quartet sang some of the old carols and other songs, and an orchestra gave selections and [accompanied] the solos of Madame Alicia Petittlerc. Manning B. Pletz began the rounds after the morning musicale had been completed. The guests of the hotel, who forgot to hang up their stocking the night before, suddenly found themselves remembered and the kiddies came in strong. Then some big, man-size fellow cornered Percy Tyrell, the manager of the Gunter, and led him over to where a hundred or more beaming countenances had assembled. They gave to him a great big, massive loving cup with the right sort of inscription. Tyrell didn't say much. There was a reason.

At one o'clock in the afternoon the one-ring circus got under way. Essie Fay, with her talking horse, Arabia, first got into the limelight. She and the equine actor were an immediate hit. And Raymond Hitchcock, the

famous musical comedy comedian, was a real clown, and with him was Buddie Miller. The elephants from the Wortham Shows, now wintering in San Antonio, did their baseball game. Captain August Folger, alias "Whale Oil Gus," and his partner, "Little Monday," displayed a lot of paraphernalia used in capturing and killing whales. Ernestine La Rose and her teddy bears, the Luck Tull's trick mules and bears, William Pilgrim, the armless and legless wonder, the fat girl and half a score of freaks helped to stage the show.

Five-twenty o'clock was the hour for the showmen's dinner. Mine host Tyrell laid out the dining tent in the ballroom. It was a place of genial warmth and myriads of lights shed their rays on the festal board where the troupe got together, and the "eats" were all that had been promised in advance, from a mighty good cook house. Manning Pletz, the boss "fixer" of the celebration, responded to the applause. He extended the felicitations of the season and said it was limitless satisfaction to know that the second annual showmen's dinner was a far greater event than others of its kind.



#### January 23, 1915

In the review of the old timers in the business, when the shows traveled by wagon, I recollect well a character that was different from any other that I ever knew in the business. His name was Dick Waterman, and for three or four years he was a driver with the Burr Robbins show. Old Dick, as he was known around the show, was not only a high-class driver, but also the best caretaker that I ever knew in the business. It was said that Dick in those days could drive more horses than the average man could carry halters for. But Dick was not a companionable person unless you knew him well. He had a repulsive face and a voice to match, and it was seldom that Dick Waterman would speak to anyone.

With the Burr Robbins show he drove six horses on the big wagon, which was considered one of the

heavy loads with the show, and on a long drive with his heavy load Dick would very often be late in getting in the morning; and while his breakfast would be waiting for him at the cook tent, he never paid any attention to his own welfare until he had looked after the care and the welfare of his horses. I more than once heard them call to him and say that if he did not hurry up that breakfast would be all over and he would get nothing until noon. But to this he paid no attention to until his horses had every care that it was possible for him to give them.

I recollect well one long drive that we had in Michigan and the road was a very bad one. As soon as the show was out at night, we had a pack-up breakfast and by 10:30 we were on the road for the next town. Along about midnight a terrible rainstorm came up and I have seldom seen it rain harder for the balance of the night. I had to be the last one out of the town and the first one in the next; and it was about 3 o'clock in the morning when I met old Dick who was sitting up high on the big wagon holding the reins over his six horses with the rain pouring down on him.

And as I passed him, the old man looked up and yelled at the top of his voice, "Good morning, Colonel. Quite a heavy London fog falling tonight."

While Dick Waterman was a crank in a way, he had a big heart in him and in his time in the business he helped many an old timer over the road. When I left the Burr Robbins show, I lost all track of Old Dick for several years until one day while we were showing on the Lake Front in Chicago, Old Dick stepped up to the ticket wagon and asked me if we recognized the profession. I was glad to see the old man, and as my work for the afternoon was about done, I told him I would be out of the wagon in a few minutes, and we would go in and take a look at the show.

Dick said to me, "I drove the big lion cage with this show when it was a wagon show, and I think it was in '71; but in all that time I don't think Adam Forepaugh spoke to me more a half dozen times. So I don't think that he will recognize me."

"Well," I said, "Dick, if Mr.



Forepaugh spoke to you a half a dozen times during the season, he probably spoke to you that many more times than you ever spoke to him."

"Perhaps that is so," said Dick, "for I don't remember of ever speaking to him unless it was to answer some question that he asked me."

We walked around to the main entrance and I told Mr. Forepaugh that this was an old friend of mine, and asked him if he ever saw him before.

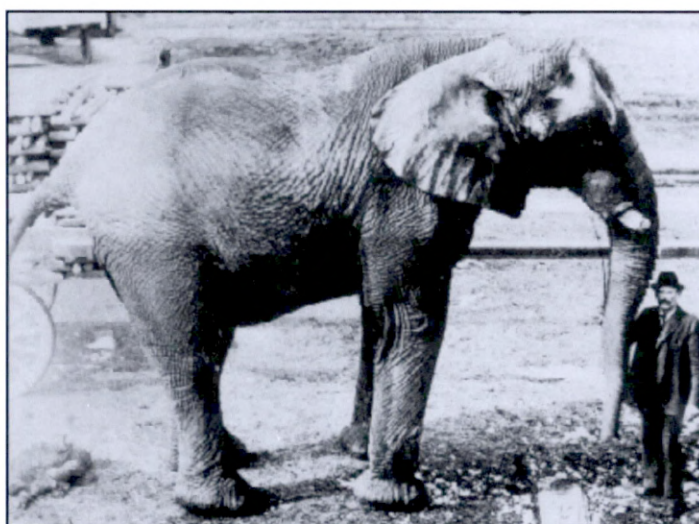
The old man took a look at Dick and immediately said, "Yes. This is Dick Waterman. He was with my show one year and as good a driver I think as we ever had. Now, Dick, if you are looking for a job, you can have the best team in the show, and I will see that you are put on the salary list for as much money as any driver with the show gets."

But Dick said that he had a good position on the south side with the Transfer Company in Chicago, and said that he would be 72 years old his next birthday and he thought that he had better remain there in Chicago where his work was easier and perhaps that he might not handle six or eight horses as well as he did years ago.

I took him to supper with me, kept him for the night show, and when the old man left me he said, "Dave, you have paid more attention to me today than anyone ever did in the business or out. But, Dave, wasn't it nice of old Adam to say that I could have the best team around the show and that you put me at the head of the salary list of drivers? But there is no use talking, I could not stand the rain and bad weather and all night drives like I did 20 years ago. And do you know I am expecting any time that the boys will sing me the old familiar song that I am too old and in the way."

He disappeared in the crowd and this was the last visit that I had with Dick Waterman.

The Hagenbeck-Wallace show, who are always on the look-out for something new and for the highest



Matthew Scott and Jumbo. Pfening Archives.

quality, have announced their intention of doing away with the old time side show, with its fat woman and skeletons, etc.; and in its place will put on what is known as the Lilliputian Menagerie. This consists of small animals of all kinds, with small people as attendants. This will be intended to attract the children particularly; but who is there among the grown people that such a show as this will not be interesting. "It surely looks to me as though this was a move in the right direction; for we have all seen the old time side show, with its freaks and monstrosities, until we have tired of diem. And this knew kind of an exhibition would certainly be a move in the right direction."

Matthew Scott, first and only keeper of the famous elephant, Jumbo, died at the Lakeview Home, Bridgeport, Conn., Dec. 22, aged 78 years. Known familiarly and affectionately among his fellow showmen as "Scotty," he was at one time as well known as his famous Jumbo.

Jumbo, an elephant of the African species, was captured when a few months old; and at the age of a little over one year became the property of the London Zoological Gardens and immediately came under the care of Matthew Scott, who at that time was a keeper in the London Zoo. Jumbo grew to an enormous size, and when about 20 years of age he was purchased by P. T. Barnum for the

Barnum & Bailey Shows, and was brought to this country as a feature of the circus.

The monstrous size of the animal, aided by an extensive publicity campaign conducted by the circus management, made the animal the most widely known attraction of circus history; and the name Jumbo became synonymous with everything that was big and ponderous. Scott, having been the only keeper the ani-

mal ever had known, and its constant human companion, was placed under contract by Barnum & Bailey and came to this country in charge of the elephant. Scott was in constant attendance and sole charge of his prodigious pet until the famous pachyderm was killed by a railroad train in St. Thomas, Canada.

### January 30, 1915

Knowing that McIntyre and Heath of "Ham Tree" fame, who showed here at the Myers Opera House Monday evening, commenced their career in the business with the circus, it was not long after their arrival at the hotel until I had them both in a corner asking them all kinds of foolish question as to their start in the business. James McIntyre told me that he practically started in the business from the Myers House corner in 1869.

"I was then quite a boy," he said, "and came here to join Pard Older, who formerly lived in Janesville, but was then proprietor of the Older show, whose winter quarters were at Independence, Iowa. As my home was in Kenosha, Wis., where some of my people still live, I came by way of Janesville on my way to Independence. That was in the early days of wagon show business, and I clowning a little, did a black face turn in the concert, and made myself generally useful around the show. Frank G. Stevens of this city was the manager and Del Comstock, also of Janesville, was the ticket agent and treasurer. The show went south in the fall and finally drifted into the yellow fever



district where it was quarantined and went to the wall. It was there that Mr. Comstock, the treasurer, died with the dreaded disease. And it was then that Tom Heath, my partner, whose home was in Philadelphia, joined me or I joined him and we have been together ever since."

As these gentlemen are entirely the tired kind, and interviewed in nearly every city in which they show, it was not so easy a matter to get them to talk very much for themselves.

The "Ham Tree" orchard of McIntyre and Heath has been one of the big successes of the country and has made them famous in every city in the world.

I also had a long visit with Edward S. Holder, who has traveled many miles in every civilized country in the world and put out more great efforts of the animal kind than any other man in the business. He said: "Dave, I want you to come up in the Opera House to my dressing room. I want to show you my scrapbook covering several years of my travels and pictures I have had taken of my acts in the different countries."

Ed Holder, for nine years, was connected with the old John Robinson Show of Cincinnati, and later furnished three or four of the big feature acts for the Barnum show on their trip through Europe. Later he made a trip of three years through Japan and China with the D. M. Bristol Show, and was in China at the time of the Boxer uprising, at which time they made a fast getaway out of the country.

Through this country Ed took ten trained razor-backed hogs, eight head of big horned steers, and six high school horses, and these were the great features of the show. With the McIntyre and Heath show, Ed was the owner and trainer of the "Ham Tree Mule," which is said to be the best trained one in the country. Ed Holder has been in the business for 28 years and in all that time has never missed a season. In his scrapbook he showed me some interesting pictures of the different acts that he had produced and notices of the highest class clipped from newspapers and magazines from different parts of the country.

When away from the show Mr. Holder's home is in Battle Creek, Mich., where his widowed mother lives.

Ed was also for a time interested in the harness horse game, in which he was successful in driving such fast ones as Ambulator, to the yearling record of 2.30, Vassar 27 1/4, Sinbad 2.08, and many others of less note. I will long remember the visit I had with Ed Holder in his dressing room, where he took me by pictures through many foreign countries as well as from ocean to ocean in this country. Ed has been with the "Ham Tree" for four years, and when asked how long he expected to remain with them, he said probably as long as the orchard of ham trees kept growing and the mule kept kicking.

It is visits like this with McIntyre and Heath and Ed Holder that puts another bright spot in your life. J. B. Austin, general agent for Gentry Brothers' show No. 1, tells with a great deal of fun a story of himself. Ben "joined out" with the Gentry shows about 20 years ago. He was employed by Wallace Gentry at Norfolk, Virginia. The job was that of programmer, which is the starting point with the advance of a tent show. Delighted with his new job, Austin jumped to Danville, Virginia, four days ahead of the show.

Henry B. Gentry, well-known showman. Pfening Archives.

When Austin "joined out" he had never seen Henry B. Gentry, founder of the shows. Henry Gentry went to the train, got him up town, and then confided to him that only some canvas men wear high hats around the show. Austin registered at one of the hotels and almost instantly began regaling the guests with wonderful stories about the Gentry brothers.

Among the most quiet and yet

most interested men was Henry B. Gentry. He says that Austin told him more about himself than he had ever known before. Austin told him what a philanthropist Henry Gentry was. Then he regaled him with stories about how Henry Gentry beat Rockefeller to the university building stunt, and he added that the best schools in Europe and America were the ones at which Gentry educated his children. Incidentally, Henry B. Gentry built hospitals and universities, libraries, etc. When Austin was through, Mr. Gentry suggested that he was a good talker and should be the press agent for the show.

"Gee, I would like to have that job," said Austin.

"You have it, young man," replied H. B. Gentry. "I am the founder of the shows, Mr. Henry B. Gentry."

And Austin has been with him ever since.

## February 6, 1915

There was one thing in show business in my time that always interested me, and that was the customs and habits of the people in the different towns. There were many towns that

when the parade was going through the principal streets in the morning, the streets would be crowded everywhere, prospects for a big business never looked better, and yet after the parade was over, there would be thousands of people starting for their homes, and never near the show in the afternoon or evening. Just when we

would think our prospects for a turn-away business were the best, many times we would show to a light house.

In 1879 with the Burr Robbins show, when we were traveling overland by wagons, and in the fall of the year when we had headed toward home, we were billed to show in Blue Island, Ill., at that time a suburb of



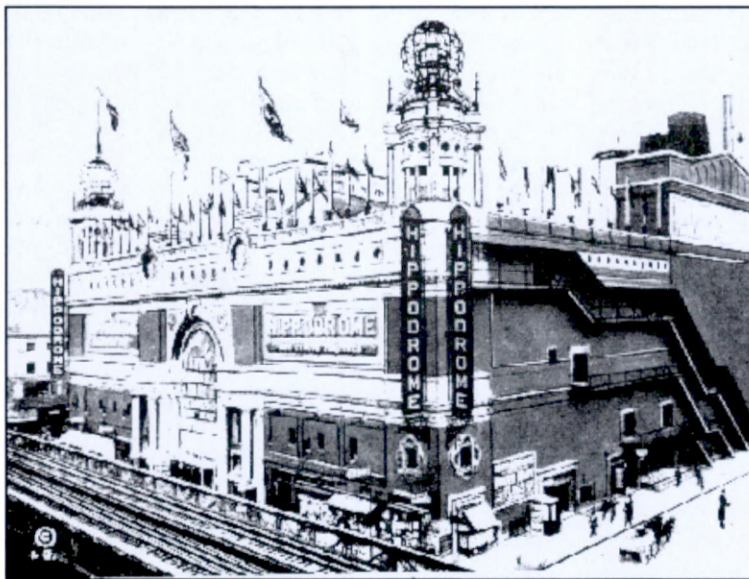


Chicago, about 15 miles out. This was largely a German town, and we arrived there early Sunday morning. As it was a suburb of Chicago, we put in most of the day Sunday putting things in the best kind of order for Monday's parade, so that we might give them as fine a display as possible.

The people were stopping at two German hotels there, the kind where everything was put on the table and you helped yourself, and that was the kind that suited a hungry lot of people traveling with the wagon show. I still remember those two hotels as being among the best that we had during the entire season. I lead the parade that morning through all the principal streets. And even at that time Blue Island was quite a town and I don't think on the entire trip of the parade that there was more than 150 people on the streets to see it. I know when I returned to the show grounds, about eleven o'clock, I told Mr. Robbins that I thought the town was well named Blue Island, and I thought we would certainly be blue enough ourselves before the day was over. And at one o'clock when the doors opened there was not more than a dozen people on the grounds, and at 1:30, the crowd around the ticket wagon and the front door was so great that it was hard to take care of them. And when the show opened at two o'clock, every seat under the canvas was taken, and hundreds of them sitting on the grass.

But this only went to show the thrift of the people, for everybody had worked up until the noon hour, and then made haste to get ready for the show. I discovered that many times, whether the crowds on the street in the morning were large or small, it was more or less of a guess as to the business we might do. 'Me night house at Blue Island, was a repetition of the afternoon, and that day was numbered among the best of the entire season.

In show business when everyone



The Hippodrome in New York City. Pfening Archives.

around the show is paid off every week, and when the show opens in the spring, it is two weeks before they have a pay-day; for all during the season there is one week held back. My first year with the Forepaugh show, my first pay-day was on Saturday in Philadelphia, and as everybody around the show were strangers to me, it was some work to get their names and numbers and pay them a week's salary. I had paid off all the drivers and canvasmen and razorbacks, who were the men that loaded and unloaded the train, and it was along toward evening when a big bony Swede came to the ticket wagon with a smile on his face, that is as much of his face as you could see, for I think that he was the dirtiest man I ever looked at.

"Well," he said, "I suppose you are the new pay boss."

When I told him I was, he said: "Well, I am the chandelier man." And when I asked him his name, he told me and it was one of those long crooked Swedish names with several strange turns in it. And when I smiled and told him that was certainly some name, he said, "Oh, you don't have to put that on d' pay roll. Ben, you know, (meaning the man whose place I took) always had me on the pay roll as 'Dirty.'"

"Well," I said, "you certainly look the part." As all his work was in oil and dust and dirt, his clothes were

filthy, his hands black and oily, and his face--well, that did not look as though it had been washed since he had had it. But for all that, he was a high class man, always had his lights well trimmed and burning, and when Adam Forepaugh died, "Dirty" was numbered among the faithful old timers who lost his happy home, and like many others drifted away and but few knew where.

Of all the year in show business, February and the early part of March at the winter quarters of the big shows is the time of the year that they are the busiest. For the larger shows that open in the large cities in the steam heated buildings usually open along toward the last of March, and it is for this time of the year that they are hustling at the winter quarters to get everything in readiness.

But that the Ringling Brothers, who own the two greatest shows in the world, have past the worrying part of the business can easily be seen, for the five brothers with their families are all down in Florida, away from the hustle and bustle of the winter quarters of their two great shows; but they have competent managers in every department looking after their part of the business, and it is safe to say that while they are many miles away, they are in close enough touch to know all about what is going on.

On the 19th of January, at the beautiful home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Ringling at Shell Beach, Florida, they held a reunion and dinner at which all the Ringlings and their families were represented. Mr. and Mrs. Al Ringling, Mr. and Mrs. John Ringling, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred T. Ringling and Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ringling and their families, were all there, which possibly might be the last time that all the families would be together, and it is not expected that any of them will be back until about March the first.



Rhoda Royal and wife, accompanied by John Agee, arrived from Chicago recently to participate in the Denver Horse show, under the management of John Talbot. The Sells-Floto-Buffalo Bill show will be represented with Rhoda's high school horses and Col. Cody, who stopped off in Denver last week en route to New York, and was prevailed upon by the horse show management to salute the crowds from the saddle of his famous horse, Isham.

The management of the Hippodrome in New York has decided to eliminate all performing wild animal acts from the circus. This action has been taken through regard for public safety. Two "steel arena" acts--three tigers, seven lions, four leopards and two puma--from the Hagenbeck-Wallace Shows were removed from the house Friday and sent back to Carthage, Ohio, because a tiger escaped last Monday and killed a splendid horse; a lion leaped over the arena bars at a rehearsal Wednesday night and a tiger knocked down and nearly killed his trainer, Emil Schweyer, during a rehearsal on Friday.

C. E. Cory, manager of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Shows, purchased from John Ringling at Bridgeport, Conn., Monday, January 25, six Pullman vestibule sleepers. This gives Hagenbeck-Wallace performers a solid vestibuled train of all Pullman. It will be as classy a train as there is in America. There are gobs of money going into this well-known show--literally gobs of it these days. And there are some surprises in store for the elect, when it takes the road.

Charles Christie, 72, retired clown of the George Fox and Revel show days, has donated \$1,000 to the Actor's Fund Benefit. In turn he will occupy a box at the benefit performance next Friday evening.

#### February 13, 1915

Did you ever notice how in a menagerie of any of the big shows that the one cage where you would always find a crowd and an interested one, is the monkey cage? For the average monkey is always doing

something. Many times they are quarreling among themselves. And if there is a particularly wise one in the cage, if he sees anyone that he thinks has a kind face or might do him a favor, he will immediately commence telling him his story of woes--how he is tired of being shut up there with a lot of monks, many of them which he says do not know anything, and would just as soon be in the cage as anywhere else. But he would like to be out and he would pledge you his word that he would not run away and he would go back in the cage any time when you said the word. These are the stories that I have often thought I have heard from the monkey cage.

The second cage to the right of the main entrance of the Forepaugh show was the monkey cage, which contained anywhere from 15 to 30 monkeys; and any time when I would stop in front of the cage there was one little fellow that would always stick out this paws and plead for me to take him out. I asked the man in charge one day if he thought he would leave the menageries if he was taken out.



"No," said he, "I have had him out many a time."

And he immediately opened the door and handed the little fellow to me. I took him to the candy stand where I bought a handful of nuts, and we found a quiet comer in the menagerie and a couple of stones and I went to work cracking the nuts. And all this time the little fellow was telling me that he was thankful to be out and what a treat it was to get the nuts, and seemed to appreciate everything that I was doing for him. But in a few minutes I stopped cracking the nuts and he commenced to yell for more, and I picked up a nut

and laid it on the big stone and handed him the small one. In a second he grabbed it and broke the nut as well as anyone, and this put him in the game. But after half an hour I took him back to the cage and he seemed to be satisfied, possibly thinking if he kicked or found fault he would not get out again. But this certainly put me in bad, for every time I would go in the menagerie after this he was watching for me and would yell his head off for me to take him out of the cage. This I did several times; but any time when I wanted to go into the big show and had no time to visit with him, I would walk around the outside of the menagerie so that he might not see me.

But the wisest monk of all is the one in the Zoological Gardens at Frankfort, Germany. His name is Basso and [he] is the world's most intelligent monkey. His brain is more nearly like yours and mine than that of any animal the world ever has known. Basso, those who know him well insist, lacks only the ability to speak to be human and possess many qualities of character that might well

be well be copied by his human companions. He is polite, gentlemanly, and fastidious. He is well worth careful study. Few travelers go to Frankfort, Germany, without paying a visit to the chimpanzee's quarter at the Zoological Gardens. He is so highly prized that he is not kept in the monkey house with the other animals. He has a large room, which he occupies with two keepers who really might be classed rather as companions. While they teach Basso much, he teaches them more. Basso was taken to Germany from the wilds of Africa when he was still a baby. Before he was a year old his caretaker noticed that he was endowed with more than common intelligence, and he was given a special teacher. In less than a month he objected to having his food served on the floor or out of doors. He insisted on having a chair and table and having his food served as his keeper got his. In a few weeks he became so fastidious he refused to take his food up in his fingers and



would only eat when he was given a -plate to eat from and a cup from which to drink. In another month he demanded a bell so he could let the waiter know when he had finished one dish and wanted another, as he insisted on having his meals served in courses. When he was taken into the gardens for his daily airings: he noticed that many of the children had small bicycles, and he threatened to take one of theirs away unless he was given one of his own. He was soon riding about at break-neck speed, often giving his keeper a lively chase. He had to go a long distance every day to get his milk, and he refused to fetch it unless he could ride his machine.

However pressed for time his keeper is, Basso will stop now and then to shake hands with a group of little folks. He loves children greatly, and he is very careful not to hurt them. Returning from his daily airing, he will jump down from his bicycle and carry it up two flights of steps alone. Basso soon noticed that the children who came to the zoo wore clothes, and he refused to go out until he was given a suit of clothes, a cap and a sunshade to keep off the beat in hot weather. In a short time he was dressing and undressing himself with splendid ease, folding up his clothes with as much care as a well-trained child. He knows all the pranks of children, such as tossing pillows, making somersaults and hiding from his keeper. He is very friendly with his callers and shakes hands with plenty of self-assurance. Though he does everything but speak, he makes himself understand by shaking his head, pointing to things and by other gestures that are a part of the sign language.

The Frontier

Days at San Francisco next season may be the biggest ever, but what about the Denver pageant? The plans call for at least 1,000 Indians to take part in the events, and Col. Cody is to superintend arrangements, with a fund of \$200,000 to be spent on it. They'll have to go to beat this.

On October 6th, 1860, Andrew G. Curtin, of Bellefonte, Pa., was elected governor of that state, and again in the fall of 1863 he was re-elected for three years more, which carried him through the war of the republic as governor of that state. And for that reason Andy Curtin, as Adam Forepaugh always called him, was known as the war governor of Pennsylvania. Adam Forepaugh and Andy Curtin had been friends from their boyhood days and when along in '84 we showed in Bellefonte, the ex-governor's home, Adam Forepaugh sent me to the Curtin home in the morning with a dozen tickets for the show with his compliments. And in the center of the reserve seats that afternoon, flags were drawn around a dozen or more seats which the governor and his friends were to occupy. A man was stationed at the main entrance and when the governor and his party arrived the band rose up and played *Hail to the Chief*. This

not only pleased the governor and his party but everyone in Bellefonte and that part of the country, for Andy Curtin seemed to be a favorite everywhere.

After the show that night the ex-governor gave a dinner to a dozen or fifteen of his gentlemen friends, and Adam Forepaugh and myself were to be among the guests. But if there was any one thing that Adam Forepaugh was not versed in it was social events. And then, too, he was afraid he would be called on to make a little speech or tell a story. He could see no other way out of it but to be sick.

"Now," he said to me, "Dave, you must go and carry my regards and tell them that you are there to represent me."

I said, "You mean to misrepresent you."

"Well," he said, "fix that up as you please, but no dinner parties in [my honor]."

The governor gave an elegant luncheon and smoker, and also had two or three good storytellers and I stayed as long as I dared to and not miss my train. And while Adam Forepaugh would do anything within reason for a friend, he would not allow them to repay him by being the guest of honor at a dinner.

# ATTENTION

## ALL NEW! COLORFUL!

### Video


George Hubler Presents

# THE SEASON' OF 1938

A 40 MINUTE ESCAPE BACK TO THE GOOD OLE DAYS!

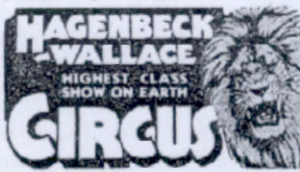


20 car show/horses/wagons/cages  
train movies and original stills



30 car show/horses/wagons/train  
movies/slides/still. Acts intro'd

**FRIDAY, APRIL 30---**



40 car show/parade/lot/stills

I attended each show & the auction & narrate these 4 great shows in one exciting VHS tape.

## FREE


18 Pages of Historical articles and pix included with each tape order.

PLUS

the tape comes in a beautiful red box,  
ALL - READY - FOR - CHRISTMAS!

**GEORGE HUBLER**

**DAYTON TUESDAY APRIL 26 COL. TIM**



40 car train; super beautiful show  
original lot/train/auction shots by Geo.

**\$25. Postpaid**

5275 DENISE DR. DAYTON O. 45429 - Tel 937-434-3744 - E Mail george@mymailstation.com

**\$25.00**



# PEACE ON EARTH



## CIRCUS HALL OF FAME PERU, INDIANA

800-771-0241

A Special Thanks to all the Circus Historians who supported our 2001 Season

## \$1,000 REWARD

Want anything pertaining to the Fred Buchanan Circuses and Granger, Iowa

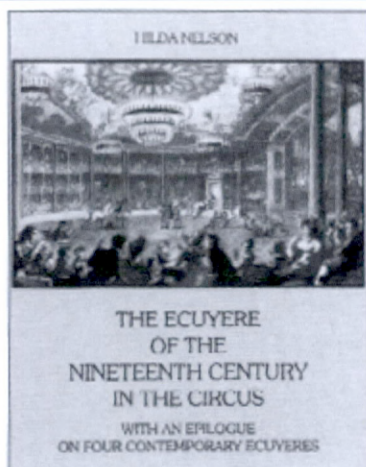
YANKEE ROBINSON 1906-1920  
WORLD BROS. 1923  
ROBBINS BROS. 1924-1931

I will pay \$1,000 to locate and use a photograph of circus train  
parked on siding at the Granger winter quarters. All letters  
answered.

**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.**

Joseph S. Rettinger  
P. O. Box 20371  
Phoenix, AZ 85036





*Long before the Olympic Games, it was in the*

## **CIRCUS,**

*where the Horse was King, that the Equestrian Masters demonstrated their Art to the masses.*

*Dr. Hilda Nelson describes in her illustrated, well documented book,*

### **THE ECUYÈRE OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY IN THE CIRCUS**

*the careers of the outstanding Lady Riders of that period, as well as four contemporary performers.*

*Foreword by Dominique Jando.*

*\$35.95 with this ad.  
Sorry, no credit cards*

*We ship the day when we  
receive your check.*

*Published by*

**XENOPHON PRESS**

*1772 Middlehurst Road*

*Cleveland Heights, OH 44118-1648*

## **ILLUSTRATED HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS OF THE BRITISH CIRCUS**

*We Take..*



**BY FRANCES BROWN**



Brought up on a travelling fair in England and educated to degree level, Frances Brown is a full time author who has devoted much of her life to writing authentic accounts of circus life. Her latest book, **Fairground Strollers and Showfolk**, is based on her father's family. It contains over 160 archive photos from the 1800s on, and has a text that has been over twenty years in the making.



**Carousels.  
Clowns.  
Bioscopes.  
Sanger's Circus.  
Scotts & Hannefords.  
Pimpo the Clown.  
Menageries.  
Road Engines.  
160 Photos, 192  
pages, Hardback.**

**First ever  
US Advert**

**New From  
England**

**Also Available — Romany Novels....**



**Set in Authentic Circus Backgrounds....**

**Order Direct From...  
Oakley Publishing  
2 The High Street  
Wiveliscombe  
TA4 2JX  
ENGLAND**

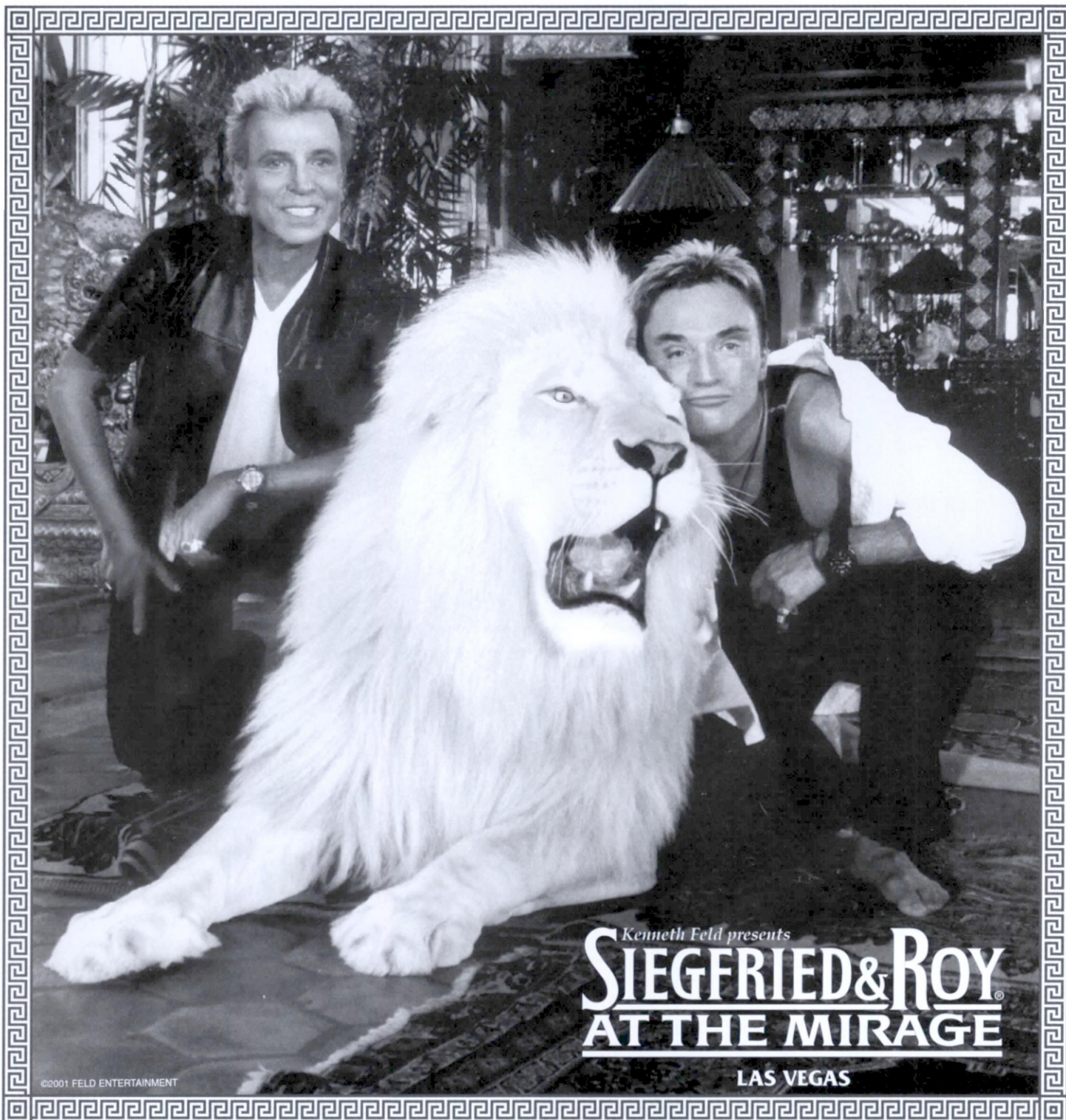
**Send your order  
By Fax or Telephone on  
01984 624181  
Or by email to  
oakleypub@virgin.net  
BOOKS SENT BY RETURN POST**

**Fairground Strollers \$40  
Romany Trilogy (3) \$30  
Including Postage.  
Pay with Dollar Bills or  
send Credit Card Details.  
Books Sent By Airmail.**

**See also  
www.oakleypub.com**







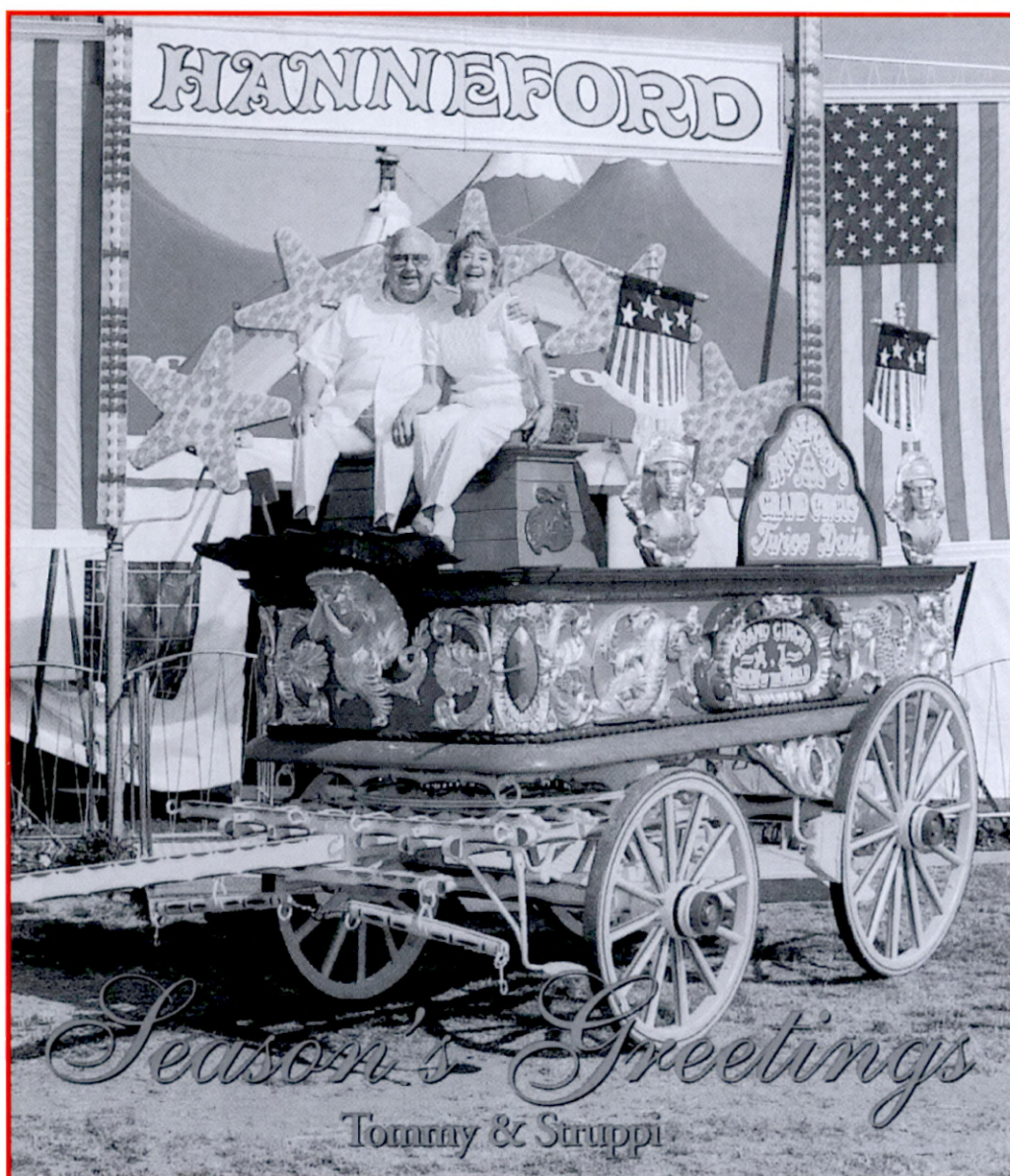
©2001 FELD ENTERTAINMENT

Kenneth Feld presents  
**SIEGFRIED & ROY®**  
**AT THE MIRAGE**

LAS VEGAS

**Wishing You A  
Magical Holiday Season!**







# Happy Holidays

Dear Santa,  
Please bring  
me some:  
elephants  
tigers  
dancing horses  
clowns  
trapeze artists  
tightrope walkers  
acrobats

From

**RINGLING  
BROS. <sup>AND</sup>**



**BARNUM  
& BAILEY<sup>®</sup>**

© 2001 Feld Entertainment

Visit us 365 days a year at [www.ringling.com](http://www.ringling.com)  
For great gift ideas, visit <http://store.ringling.com>